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A History

OF

The Praja Socialist Party

[1934-59]

Hari Kishore Singh,
M. A. B. Litt. (Oxon)

NARENDRA PRAKASHAN
LUCKNOW.

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PUBLISHERS' NOTE

Indian Socialists are immensely indebted to Acharya Narendra Deva for his inspiring leadership and guidance. During his life time Acharyaji invariably provided line of action and thought to Socialists especially to the younger generation who were always impressed by the brilliance and profoundity of his analysis of situations. Keeping in view the contributions of Acharyaji towards building up of a socialist movement in the country, some of his admirers decided to start a publication series after his name to provide intellectual nourishment for creating a democratic socialist society in India—a life long ambition of Acharya Narendra Deva.

This publication is first of the Series. 'A History of the Praja Socialist Party' is a fruitful result of persistent study of our young friend Shri Hari Kishore Singh. Shri Hari Kishore is a socialist of long standing. He has been actively associated with the Socialist Youth Movement. This publication, a long felt need, is the outcome of his research work at the University of Oxford. He collected materials from all available sources and has tried to present facts as they were.

We are glad that it has been possible to synchronise the publication of this book with the completion of a quarter of a century's existence of the Socialist Movement in India.

PREFACE

Indian Socialist Movement is completing its twenty fifth years of existence. The attempts of Socialists both in the realm of ideas and in the field of action are fascinating. Since the Congress Socialist days they have tried to achieve a synthesis of three epoch making ideas in the twentieth Century—Marxism, Nationalism and Social Democracy. Because of their active and organic associations with the national movement Gandhian methodology also made its impact on them. In the following pages the development of the Indian Socialist Movement has been explained in the light of the varying influences of these apparently diverse and mutually hostile systems of thought. Whether this attempt has borne any fruit must be left to the readers to decide. For me the Socialists' adventure in the realm of ideas has been an intellectual stimuli for several years past. The adoption of the mass media of a people's struggle for freedom and equality for achieving this synthesis gives an unique touch to the attempt of the Socialists. To any intelligent observer this intellectual process of blending together of different systems of thought should be both interesting and provoking. I have tried to present a brief account of it and would feel satisfied if the subject attracts some more experienced and able hand in the profession .

Chamanpur, Muzaffarpur (Bihar)
November 1, 1959. **Hari Kishore Singh**

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The idea of writing a history of the Indian Socialist Movement first muted at Oxford and formed the subject of my thesis for the degree of Bachelor of Letters. I am greateful to Mr. Francis G. Carnell, Senior Lecturer in Commonwealth Government, University of Oxford for his inspiring guidance, help and encouragement in the preparation of my work.

My friends Kamala Di Tella, Gopal Krishna, Ramadhar, Sant Bux Singh, Donald Chesworth and Man Mohan helped me with materials for this book. As a student at Oxford I had the opportunity of discussing my subject with the great Socialist thinker and historian Prof. G. D. H. Cole who had agreed to write a foreword to this book. But unfortunately it could not be materialised because of his sudden death in Feb. 1959.

My friends Om prakash, Patitapawan, Satyaprakash Mittal and Vishwanath Khandelwal deserve thanks for their untiring efforts in bringing out this book. I am also grateful to Shri Swaminath Pande of Sarva Seva Sangh for his keen interest in the publication of the book and efficiently doing the tedious job of proof reading.

To the Warden, Fellows and Staff of St. Antony's College, I am indebted for enabling me to spend three valuable and pleasant years at Oxford, without whose co-operation perhaps it would not have been possible for me to present this book at this stage. Equally important was the encouragement given by Niloufer Patel and Pratibha Singh.

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A History

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[1934-59]

CHAPTER I THE BACKGROUND

The failure of the 1930 and 1932 Civil Disobedience Movements, together with the breakdown of the two Round Table Conferences, created an atmosphere of dejection and despondency in India.[1] Mahatma Gandhi had proclaimed his intention to devote himself to what he called 'constructive works', and this strengthened the belief that the national movement had a bleak future. Many interpreted the withdrawal of the Mahatma from active politics as proof of the failure of non-violent methods to achieve national independence. In this atmosphere of disappointment and disillusion two embryonic trends were noticeable.

First, there appeared an influential group of Congress leaders who as 'constitutionalists' were prepared to participate in the Assembly elections provided for by the Joint Parliamentary Committee's recommendations. For this purpose, they endeavoured to revive the old Swaraj Party.

Secondly, there developed amongst the general mass of younger Congressmen, who were by no means in agreement on ideological issues, a strong feeling that the Congress answer to the new situation should be the adoption of a really militant policy. Within this group were men who had either come under Marxist influence or who had imbibed social democratic ideas from Western countries. Broadly speaking, all of them could be called socialist in outlook. They had always been

1. A. R. Desai, *Social Background of Indian Nationalism*, Bombay, 1954, p. 326.

sceptical about Gandhi's ideas and his particular technique of national struggle, but owing to the prestige of the Mahatma they had reluctantly felt that the Civil Disobedience Movements should be given a fair trial. By 1934 these left wing elements within Congress had become thoroughly persuaded that Gandhian methods of struggle were likely to be totally ineffective. They were convinced that for success to be achieved there must be participation by the mass of the people in the national movement, and that the support of the masses would be forthcoming only when Indian nationalism succeeded in identifying itself with their aspirations.

Now at this time, support for the peasants and workers in their economic and social demands was bound to antagonise landlord and vested interests within Congress, since it would necessarily raise the issue of class struggle. The prospect of such a conflict was most unwelcome to many Congress leaders as was well appreciated by Jawaharlal Nehru, himself a socialist :

> The Congress as a whole, was a purely nationalist body,and included many middling zamindars, and a few of the larger ones also. Its leaders were terribly afraid of anything which might raise the class issue, or irritate the Zamindar elements. So, right through the first six months of Civil Disobedience, they avoided calling for a general no-tax campaign in the rural areas, although conditions for this seemed to me to be ripe. I was not afraid of raising the class issue in this or any other way, but I recognised that the Congress, being what it was, could not then patronise class conflict.[2]

The right wing elements in the Congress therefore tended to pin their faith for the immediate future in a revival of the Swaraj Party. But this was regarded as a retrogressive step by

2. Jawaharlal Nehru, *An Autobiography*, London, 1949, p. 232.

the left wing who were convinced that since the deaths of C. R. Das and Motilal Nehru, who had led the party in the Bengal and Central legislatures, the party had lost its glamour and had quite ceased to put up a militant opposition. Though it might well continue to appeal to moderates, it had little to offer for the future.[3]

The left wing regarded the economic policy of the old Swaraj Party as essentially unprogressive, and judging from one of its election manifestos, they were probably right :

> We must supplement the work of the Congress by helping the labour and peasant organisations throughout the country. The problem of labour is always a difficult problem to some in every country, but in India the difficulties are greater. On the one hand, we must find out organisations by which we can prevent exploitation of labour by capitalists or landlords, but on the other hand, we must be on our guard to see that these organisations may not themselves be the source of oppression by nourishing extravagant and unreasonable demands.
>
> Labour undoubtedly requires protection, but so also do industrial enterprises. Our organisation must protect both from exploitation, and the Trade Union Congress must be so organised as to be able to serve this useful purpose. We

3. At the Foundation Conference of the C. S. P. at Patna, 1934 Acharya Narendra Deva expressed the Left wing reaction to the proposed revival of the Swaraj Party when he declared : " I have a genuine fear that being deprived of the healthy influence of the revolutionary movement, the autonomous Swarajist organisation will, in course of time, become a pacca (full proof) constitutional and reformist body and will run counter to the revolutionary policy of the Congress."

Acharya Narendra Deva, *Socialism and National Revolution*, Bombay, 1946, p. 26.

hold that in the long the real interests of both and of the country at large are identical.[4]

Such doctrines of class harmony, similar to those preached by Gandhi, were unlikely to appeal to young socialists who, under Marxist influences, had convinced themselves of the inevitability of the class struggle. What is more, there were Swarajists themselves who were not convinced by the doctrine of class harmony. At a conference of the 'Constitutionalists' held in May 1934, M. R. Masani urged members to undertake the organisation of peasants and workers in order to strengthen the struggle against British imperialism. The opposition to this proposal confirmed the existing suspicions of the left wing of the 'reactionary character' of the proposed party and of the undesirability of its revival.[5] Indeed, the agreement reached at the all Party Conference in 1928 on the question of property rights had already been a clear indication of the attitude of the right wing leaders of the Congress to economic problems. On that occasion they had declared that 'all titles to private and personal property lawfully acquired at the establishment of the Commonwealth (i. e. independence) are hereby guaranteed.'[6]

The leading figures in the revived Swaraj Party, Dr. Ansari, K. M. Munshi, Bhula Bhai Desai and B. C. Roy were all well known for their orthodox conservative ideas on social and economic problems, and thus the attempted rejuvenation of the party gave little comfort to radical and socialist elements in the national movement.

4. Pattabhi Sitaramayya, *History of the Indian National Congress*, Bombay 1946, Vol. I, p. 274.
5. Lakhan Pal, *History of the Congress Socialist Party*, Lahore, 1946, p. 17.
6. Pattabhi Sitaramayya, *op. cit.*, p. 325.

Nevertheless, the Swaraj Party leaders were successful in winning the approbation of Mahatma Gandhi. In a statement after a meeting with the Mahatma, Dr. Ansari declared :

> He considers it right and the duty of Congressmen who were not offering Civil Resistance and who believed in work in legislatures to prosecute the programme which they believe to be in the interests of the country. He goes even further and promises at all times to render such assistance to the Swaraj Party as lies in his power to give.[7]

Gandhi's favourable response to the overtures of the Swaraj Party was a further disillusionment to the militant left wing Congressmen. They were already intensely angry with him for the flimsy reasons he had given for the suspension of the Civil Disobedience Movement in 1933.[8] Jawaharlal Nehru had described these as ' an insult to the intelligence ' and ' an amazing performance ' for the leader of a national movement.[9] Another

7. Lakhan Pal, *op. cit.*, p. 16.
   See also Mahatma Gandhi's letter to Dr. Ansari, *Modern Review*, Calcutta, May, 1934.
8. When suspending the Movement Gandhi stated :
   " This statement owes its inspiration to a personal chat with the intimates and associates of the Satyagraha Ashram . . . . .More especially it is due to revealing information I got in the course of conversation about a valued companion of long standing who was found reluctant to perform the full prison task, preferring his private studies to the allocated task. This is undoubtedly contrary to the rules of Satyagraha. More than the imperfection of the friend whom I love, more than ever it brought home to me my own imperfections. The friend said he had thought that I was aware of his weakness. I was blind. Blindness in a leader is unpardonable. I saw at once that I must for the time being remain the sole representative of Civil Resistance in action ".
9. *Ibid.*, p. 506.

leader, Subhas Bose, in a joint statement with the essentially moderate Vitthal Bhai Patel, saw in the suspension of the Civil Disobedience Movement an outright 'confession of failure'. These two leaders made the following significant declaration :

> We are clearly of the opinion that Mr. Gandhi as a political leader has failed. The time has come for a radical reorganisation of the Congress on a new method, for which a new leader is essential.[10]

A source of fundamental disagreement between the socialists and Gandhi was his conception of 'trusteeship', according to which landlords and capitalists were merely trustees of the wealth of society and were to use it judiciously and wisely for the general well being of the whole community.[11]

This rather naive defence of the Zamindari system was a matter of great concern to the left wingers and they lost no opportunity of condemning it. Nehru's reaction against 'trusteeship' was representative of the whole left wing approach when he confessed that :

> What upset me much more was Gandhiji's defence of the Zamindari system. He seemed to think that this was a very desirable part of rural and national economy. This was a great surprise to me for the big Zamindaris and taluqas have very few defenders today.[12]

A further source of much irritation to the left wing critics was Gandhi's glorification of poverty.[13] It was felt that acceptance of this principle in the circumstance of India might easily turn into a moral justification of the existing sub-human living

10. R. Palme Dutt, *India Today*, Bombay, 1949, p. 353.
11. Jayaprakash Narayan, *Why Socialism* ? Banaras, 1936, pp. 90-92.
12. Jawaharlal Nehru, *op. cit.*, pp. 477-78.
13. Jayaprakash Narayan, *op. cit.*, pp. 87-90.

conditions. There was a fear that acceptance of poverty would lead inevitably to the tolerance, and indeed perpetuation, of the conditions responsible for poverty.

Again, Gandhi's opposition to modern science and technology caused most serious misgivings in many quarters. As early as 1909 he had declared that India's salvation lay in unlearning what she had learnt during the past fifty years :

> The railway, telegraphs, hospitals, lawyers, doctors and such like have to go, and the so called upper classes have to learn consciously, religiously, deliberately the simple peasant life, knowing it to be a life giving true happiness . . . .Every time I get into a railway car, or use a motor bus I know that I am doing violence to my sense of what is right. To expect to reform the world by means of highly artificial and speedy locomotion is to attempt the impossible.[14]

Since the Mahatma never recanted his antagonism to modern science, the left wingers always had serious doubts about the feasibility of his whole programme for national reconstruction. And their scepticism was probably justifiable when one considers his remarkably unpredictable reactions to events in the world around him. His comment, for instance, on the Bihar earthquake in January 1934 was typical of a man who looked to God rather than to science for understanding. He described this terrible disaster as God's punishment for the sin of untouchability, a verdict which quite appalled Rabindra Nath Tagore. Nehru called it a 'staggering remark' and declared that 'anything more opposed to scientific outlook it would be difficult to imagine'.[15]

After the suspension of the Civil Disobedience Movement,

14. Jawaharlal Nehru, *op. cit.*, p. 510.
15. *Ibid.*, p. 490.

the Mahatma, to everyone's surprise, calmly immersed himelf in Khadi work. As this was at a time when, to the socialists, the need for political action was more imperative than ever. his behaviour seemed quite inexplicable. Many of his followers, including his closest associates, were quite unable to fathom the workings of his mind. He himself admitted to Nehru that it was impossible to predict in what direction ' this unknown element in him ' might lead him. Nehru has recorded his own reaction to one of Gandhi's bombshells, the Gandhi-Irwin Pact :

> I told him that this way of springing surprises upon us frightened me; there was something unknown about him which, in spite of the closest association for fourteen years, I could not understand at all, and which filled me with apprehension.[16]

This sense of bewilderment caused by Gandhi's methods obviously provided the left wing with considerable ammunition. So also did that special bane of Indian political life, communal antagonism.

The Growth of Communal Politics

The steady and deplorable growth of communalism in India had reached a decisive stage in its unhealthy progress by the early 1930s. The leadership of the Indian delegation to the First Round Table Conference had been in the hands of the Aga Khan who was regarded by the Nationalists as an arch communalist and ' reactionary '.[17] The Aga Khan had been active in the formation of the Muslim League in 1906 and he had been its president for several years. It is hard to deny that his role as leader of the Indian delegation in London greatly stimulated communal feeling, particularly Muslim communalism.

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16. *Ibid.*, p. 260.
17. *Ibid.*, p. 293.

On the other hand, it has equally to be conceded that the failure of the Congress led Civil Disobedience Movements also encouraged the Hindu communalists. Previously overshadowed by the Mahatma, they now dared to come out into the open. Their emergence at this time led to the formation of the Nationalist Party under Lala Lajpat Rai and Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya and to the revival of the Hindu Maha Sabha under Vir Sawarkar.

In some parts of India, notably Bengal, the communal problem was undoubtedly an expression of economic cleavages. Here the landlords were generally Hindus and their tenants Muslims, a situation which provided a fertile field in which Muslim communalists could sow unrest and sectarianism amongst the peasants. Needless to say, the communalists held highly conservative views on all social and economic question and their tactics considerably slowed down the tempo of the nationalist movement.

The left wing of Congress was convinced that the growing communalism was both cause and effect of the failure up to now to create a mass movement for independence. Jayaprakash Narayan complained that the Congress was primarily middle class in outlook and that bourgeois ideals, ambitions and desires dominated it. Thus there had arisen a mentality which cared more for seats in legislatures than for creating a genuine mass movement.[18]

Narayan insisted that the communal problem was primarily economic in origin, and that had the Congress championed the grievances of the Muslim peasantry the growth in Muslim communalism would have been checked.[19] The socialists

18. Jayaprakash Narayan, *Towards Struggle*, Bombay, 1946, p. 114.
19. *Ibid.*, p. 111.

therefore urged the necessity for working out universally acceptable ideals and goals which would appeal to Muslim and Hindu alike and which would thus prevent the virus of communalism from further poisoning Indian political life.

Nehru, who as his *Autobiography* reveals, was at this time increasingly disturbed by the failure of the Gandhian techniques to limit the growth of communalism, and who was increasingly attracted to socialism as a solution, was broadly in agreement with the objectives of the socialist group :

> The want of clear ideals and objectives in our struggle for freedom undoubtedly helped the spread of communalism. The masses saw no clear connection between their day to day sufferings and the fight for Swaraj. They fought well enough at times by instinct, but that was a feeble weapon which could be easily blunted or even turned aside for other purposes. There was no reason behind it, and in periods of reaction it was not difficult for the communalists to play upon this feeling and exploit it in the name of religion.[20]

The desire to limit the destructive force of communalism thus led many at this time to look to socialism as a panacea for India's social, economic and political ills. By grouping people on a class basis might it not effectively cut across those communal divisions which seemed to widen rather than contract in a capitalist India ?

One of the principal weapons the socialists began to forge at this time was the Youth Movement.

The Growth of the Youth Movement

The phenomenal growth of student and youth movements all over India at this time, and their active participation in the fight for freedom, was a growing source of strength to the radical

20. Jawaharlal Nehru, *op. cit.*, pp. 137-38.

elements inside the Congress. The idealism of youth was being harnessed to the national struggle.

During the late 1920s and under various names, youth and student leagues had begun to proliferate all over the country. Particularly in Bengal and the Punjab, and to some extent in U. P., Bihar and Bombay, the divisions in the Congress leadership had had the effect of stimulating a keen desire for more militant action amongst the students. The founders of the Congress Socialist Party included many who had been active in the Youth Leagues like Yusuf Meherally. Anxious that the impatient youth of India should not fritter away their energies in 'adventurism', these leaders tried to divert youthful enthusiasm for rapid social and economic change into creative channels. They felt increasingly that the moderate leadership and divided mind of the Congress had little to offer Indian youth, and that since youth could be mobilised for the national movement only on the basis of a clear, radical programme, then here was favourable ground on which to sow the seeds of the socialist faith.

The left wing group within Congress was also intent on winning over the peasants to a more militant outlook.

The Growth of the Peasant Movement

The impact of Gandhi's mass Civil Disobedience Movements had caused a great ferment amongst the peasantry, already stirred from their traditional ways of life. Instead of looking up to the landed aristocracy as their natural leaders, the peasants had begun to pin their hopes for support and relief on the leadership of the middle classes as represented by the Congress.[21]

There were at this time special reasons for a great surge of peasant discontent. The catastrophic fall in agricultural prices in the world depression of the 1930s created unimaginable suffe-

21. Acharya Narendra Deva, op. cit., pp. 37-38.

ring and distress in the Indian village. The economic crisis forced many peasants and small landowners to sell their land. Productivity fell and marginal land went out of cultivation; many peasants were completely ruined.

The situation of the landless labourer was even more desperate. In some places there were riots and disturbances, and a powerful impetus was given to the growth of the peasant movement all over the country. Innumerable campaigns for reduction in land rent and for the relief of indebtedness were successfully launched up and down the country. These struggles created a new sense of political awareness amongst the peasantry, who as a result of coming into contact with new ideas began to question age-old assumptions.

Now the Congress attitude to this peasant ferment was never more than one of lukewarm interest. There was always the greatest reluctance to lead the peasantry against the Zamindars in Bengal, Bihar and the United Provinces, where landlordism was deeply entrenched, as opposed to the Ryotwari system elsewhere under which there was no landed middle class standing between the government and the peasants.

In this situation, the socialists felt that no opportunity should be lost of profiting from the new militancy of the peasants. National independence should be regarded not merely as a means of ending foreign rule but also as the one and only road to the emancipation of India's teeming millions of peasants and workers from exploitation and serfdom.

The determination of the left wing to bring the peasants into the nationalist movement, on the basis a programme of agrarian reform inspired by socialist principles, was bound to lead to conflict with the landlords interests in Congress. As will be seen later, acute differences arose after 1937 between the Congress Provincial Governments and the Kisan Sabha, the

peasant organisation in which the Socialists were to play a leading role.

Socialism in a Colonial Situation

Marxism was the most important single influence in the political thinking of the younger generation of Congressmen who were now so discontented with the Gandhian techniques of struggle. They had all been profoundly impressed by the Bolshevik Revolution;[22] news about the Russian transformation of Central Asia, was now beginning to seep into India. The eulogistic accounts of the Soviet Union's First Five Year Plan further encouraged sympathetic interest.

Though there was already some apprehension about Stalin's leadership, the Soviet experiment had become the ideal of the Indian Left by the early 1930s. Even liberals like Rabindra Nath Tagore were impressed by the Russians' achievements in transforming a backward economy in a rapidly short space of time. The Russians' success seemed to stand in striking contrast to the failure of the Civil Disobedience Movements, so that the radical and left wing group within the Congress was all the more critical of the weaknesses of the Gandhian method. They became more than ever convinced of the effectiveness of the Leninist technique of struggle. It is therefore not surprising that by this time the socialists were abandoning Gandhism for Marxism-Leninism.

The question has often been asked whether there can be a place for a socialist party in a colonial situation. In other words, is it possible under foreign rule for a socialist movement to develop independently of the nationalist movement ? Secondly,

22. Jayaprakash Narayan, *Why Socialism* ? Banaras, 1936, pp. 55-56, and 60-62.
Also, Jawaharlal Nehru, *op. cit.*, pp. 361-63.

can a socialist society actually be established under the auspices of a foreign administration ? These were two thorny problems faced by those who established the Congress Socialist Party at Patna in 1934.

In considering the possibility of a socialist movement evolving independently of the nationalist movement, it is worth while looking at the record of the Indian Communist Party. From the time of its foundation, it adopted an inconsistent policy towards the nationalist movement as represented by the Congress, alternating continually between support and hostility. At this particular time, as will be shown later, the Indian Communists, under the influence of the decisions of the Sixth Congress of the Comintern, were pursuing a definite policy of opposition to the Congress. They kept aloof from the 1930 and 1932 Civil Disobedience Movements. This policy had the effect of isolating them from the national movement and caused a great decline in their influence. This example of the failure of the Communist Party to associate itself with the nationalist struggle had a profound influence on the political thinking of the founders of the Congress Socialist Party. They were convinced they would have to establish their movement and their party within the Congress itself.

We come now to our second question : Can a socialist society actually be established under the auspices of a foreign administration ? It is incontestable that a socialist movement cannot be effective in a colonial situation. There is a clash of interest between the masses on the one hand and the economic interests of the metropolitan power on the other. A colonial government, for example, can never permit the abolition of landlordism and the destruction of a capitalist economy. The whole history of colonial rule in India and elsewhere provides no convincing evidence to the contrary. This is partly because the colonial

power, in order to take the fullest advantage of local resources, always has to make an alliance with indigenous vested interests. The universal pattern of the colonial system is the alliance between native feudalism and the colonial power. In every conflict that occurred in the British period between the Indian working class and the Indian bourgeoisie, the British always came down on the side of the latter, notwithstanding the fact that there was a basic conflict of interest between the Indian and British bourgeoisies, and despite the support given to the nationalist movement by Indian capitalism.

In the case of the Indian landlords, the problem for the British was even less complicated. Co-operation between the native princes and aristocracy on the one hand, and the British Government on the other, suited the interests of all parties. The British needed the princes' support for their rule, and the feudal elements needed British protection against the peasants. This was undoubtedly the real reason for the opposition of the landed aristocracy and the Princely States to the nationalist movement.

It was considerations such as these that led India's pioneer socialists to realise that the achievement of a socialist society was impossible without first achieving national freedom. Unlike the Indian Communists, they did not make the fatal mistake of giving priority to socialism over nationalism. The right to self-determination was one of the basic tenets in the socialists' political thinking because they realised that the achievement of socialism in a colonial situation was a mirage. Unlike the Communists, they recognised that it would be fatal to go against the broad current of nationalism, and that what was really needed was not so much to press the claims of socialism against the more negative aspects of nationalism as endeavour to give a positively directed nationalism a social content.

The Founders of the Congress Socialist Party

In Asia personalities always play a vital role in politics; they are consequently important even in a socialist movement whose leaders, as Marxists, were addicted to the most wearisome theorising about 'theses', 'lines' and 'ideology'.

The Congress Socialist Party was founded in 1934 and held its first All India Conference at Patna in May of that year. As we have seen, socialism was 'in the air' from the time of the failure of the Civil Disobedience Movements. Socialist groups had been formed in a number of Provinces by the early 1930s being made up to those younger Congressmen who had come under the influence of either Marxism or western democratic socialism. But the actual plan for an all-India socialist organisation seems to have conceived and worked out at Nasik Central Prison by certain left wing Congressmen who had been detained as a result of the Civil Disobedience Movement. The founding fathers thus became known as the 'Nasik Group'.

As these leaders were to play such a prominent part in the history of the Congress Socialist Party we should pause at this stage and consider what kind of men these socialist pioneers were.

The most important of them was undoubtedly Jayaprakash Narayan[23] who was destined to play a crucial role in the development of the Party for more than twenty years. Narayan was born of middle peasant stock at a tiny Bihar village in 1903, and after attending the local English school went to the United

23. For a detailed account of Jayaprakash Narayan's life see :
    (a) Ram Briksha Benipuri, *Jayaprakash* (in Hindi), Patna, 1948.
    (b) Jagat S. Bright, *The Red Fugitive*, Lahore, 1946.
    (c) Yusuf Meherally *Jayaprakash Narayan* in Jayaprakash Narayan's '*Towards Struggle*', Bombay, 1946, pp. pp. 7-14.
    (d) G. S. Bhargava, *Leaders of the Left*, Bombay, 1951, pp. 31-33.

States for university education. There he came into contact with American Communists and joined the Party. His enthusiasm for communism suffered a setback when on his way back to India via London he discovered that the Indian Communist Party was taking its orders from Moscow. It was in accordance with policies laid down by the Sixth Comintern Congress that the Indian Communist Party was not participating in the nationalist movement.

Disillusioned by this discovery, Narayan, on his arrival back in India joined the Congress, becoming responsible, at the request of Nehru, for the Labour Department of the All India Congress Committee. Thus began his active political career and a personal friendship with Nehru which has been proof against all the political differences which have subsequently come between them. But though he had joined the Congress, Narayan remained a Marxist. He was especially influenced by the failure of the European Social Democratic parties to cope with the 1929-31 slump and by the growth of fascism. He thus concluded that :

> For a socialist party to be true to its ideals and survive it was necessary to be militant in outlook and practice.[24]

Narayan never thought highly of the Gandhian technique of satyagraha as an effective weapon for achieving independence, and he had no faith that parliamentary democracy was likely to be any more effective. Throughout the colonial period, he was a convinced believer in the class struggle and in insurrectionary methods for achieving national as well as socialist aims. The ideas he held in this period are set out in his book '**Why Socialism ?**' Like many other Indian socialists he was profoundly impressed by the achievements of the Russian Revolution and

24. G. S. Bhargava, *op. cit.*, p. 33.

the whole technique of Soviet planning for industrialisation in a backward economy.

As we shall see later, the westernised Narayan who originally had little patience with Gandhian techniques, in middle age has fallen to some extent under the very spell of that traditional India which was so well symbolised in the person of Mahatma Gandhi. Narayan has recently left the Praja Socialist Party to devote his life to the Bhoodan (land gift) Movement led by Gandhi's disciple, Vinoba Bhave.[25]

Another prominent Indian socialist pioneer was Yusuf Meherally.[26] It is not easy to place him in the socialist hierarchy as he never held office in the all-India party, but his influence on its policy and programme was always very considerable. An exact contemporary of Narayan, he was born in 1903, the son of a prosperous Bombay businessman who, in accordance with family tradition, firmly supported British rule and had all the upper class prejudices. His great grandfather had been an industrial pioneer, building the first Indian textile mill. Meherally's imprisonment in 1930 was a great shock to his family who described it 'as a disgrace to the family that one of its members was a law-breaker.'

As a student, Meherally studied the history of revolutions and was greatly impressed by the role played in them by organised youth movements. He read the writings of Mazzini and and Garibaldi and closely studied accounts of the Russian and Chinese revolutions. Like many other Indians at this time he was deeply interested in the techniques adopted by the Irish

25. See Jayaprakash Narayan, *Jeevandan*, Bombay, 1954, *Kranti Ke Adhunik Prayog*, Patna, 1934, pp. 1-48, and *Political Trends*, Bombay 1951, pp. 15-17.

26. G. B. Bhargava, *op. cit.*, pp. 1-8.

nationalists. Meherally was an enthusiastic supporter of the first Civil Disobedience Movement and was much dismayed by its abrupt ending as well as by the unconvincing reasons given by Mahatma Gandhi for ending it. This failure convinced him more than ever of the necessity of a youth movement dedicated to the cause of national independence. His efforts led in 1928 to the founding of the Bombay Provincial Youth League which played a leading part in organising the public boycott of the Simon Commission. Following the boycott, in which he was injured in a demonstration, he achieved a prominent position in the public life of Bombay province. From then on, until his death in 1949 he was always in the thick of the political fray. It was during his second imprisonment in 1932 that he came into contact with other socialists in Nasik gaol and thus became one of the founders of the Congress Socialist Party.

Achyuta Patwardhan[27] was another prisoner at Nasik who contributed to the formation of the Party, and he continued as one of its respected leaders until his retirement from politics in 1950. Born in 1905, the second son of a rich theosophist father, Patwardhan was educated at Banaras Hindu University where he was powerfully influenced by the prevailing nationalist atmosphere. After a visit to Europe, as a young University lecturer he was drawn into the Civil Disobedience Movement and ultimately found himself in Nasik Central Prison.

Patwardhan's rise in politics was meteoric. In 1936, when Nehru became Congress President for the second time, he was appointed a member of the Congress Working Committee, being the youngest man ever to achieve such high office. During the 1942 'Quit India' phase of intense agitation against Britain

27. *Ibid.*, pp. 51-56.

he played an important part in organising an 'underground' in co-operation with his socialist colleague, Dr. Lohia. After 1947, despite warm personal relations with many leading Congressmen (including Sardar Patel) Patwardhan became disillusioned and in 1948 he left the Congress along with other members of the Socialist Party.

Patwardhan is a good example of the Gandhian strand in Indian Socialism as opposed as to the Marxist strand represented by Narayan in his early days and by Acharya Narendra Deva. Patwardhan's Gandhism was possibly fortified by his theosophist upbringing and by the influence of his elder brother, Rao Saheb. Theosophist influences may also have been responsible for the ultimate withdrawal of both brothers from politics. Achyut Patwardhan now devotes himself to constructive work in the villages, being actively associated with J. Krishna Murty's movement for 'New Eduation'.

Another member of the 'Nasik Group' was Asoka Mehta. Born in 1911 in Sholapur he was unique in more ways than one amongst his fellow socialists in Nasik gaol. His father was an outstanding literary figure in Gujarati, and took an active interest in the promotion of education, but he died at the early age of 32. After matriculation at Sholapur Mehta went to Bombay University where he gradually became involved in political agitation. As in the case of the others, it was the 1932 Civil Disobedience Movement that brought him to Nasik gaol.

Asoka Mehta[28] is still a prominent leader of the Indian Praja Socialist Party. He is a good example of the social democratic strand in Indian socialism, his political thinking having been influenced by European democratic socialism. He has never

28. *Ibid.*, pp. 64-70.

been enthusiastic about the importation of Russian techniques into India and has not been appreciably influenced by Marxism. Together with Patwardhan, M. R. Masani and Lohia, he was one of the opponents of the communist inspired 'United Front'.

Mehta has a cool and logical mind which has proved both an asset and a liability for his Party. He probably excels as an organiser. His crowning achievement as a trade unionist was undoubtedly the formation in 1949 of the Hind Mazdoor Sabha. Since the 1951-52 general election Mehta has shared the feeling of frustration and disappointment widespread in the Party, and his more recent ideas have often embarrassed his colleagues.

Other notable prisoners at Nasik who became founders of the Congress Socialist Party were M. R. Masani, S. M. Joshi and N. G. Goray. Masani, the son of a rich Bombay Parsi business man studied at the London School of Economics and was influenced by Fabian thought. Like Mehta he is a good example of the social democratic strand in Indian socialism. Masani was an important leader of the Congress Socialist Party for many years, but he later changed his ideas and turned to Gandhism. Today he is intensely anti-communist and an ardent champion of free enterprise.

S. M. Joshi and N. G. Goray have always been leading figures in the Party in Maharastra. The former is leader of the opposition in the Bombay Assembly, and the latter a member of the House of the People at the Centre. Both are prominent advocates of states reorganisation on a linguistic basis which is still an important issue in undivided Bombay.

Finally we come to two prominent socialist leaders, Acharya Narendra Deva and Dr. Ram Manohar Lohia, who were not members of the original 'Nasik Group' of socialists.

Acharya Narendra Deva,[29] the Grey Eminence of the Indian Socialist Party until his recent death, was born in 1889. He took an interest in politics from an early age and used to attend the annual gatherings of the Indian National Congress in the company of his lawyer father. His early sympathies were with the Tilak Group and he was much influenced by other revolutionaries like Lala Hardayal and Aurobindo. After the Russian Revolution which had a profound influence on him he immersed himself in Marxist literature to such effect as to come to be regarded as one of Marx's greatest exponents in India.

His active participation in politics began with Mrs. Besants Home Rule Movement and never ceased. As he became more and more convinced of the role of the class struggle and of the importance of giving a mass basis to the Indian nationalist movement,so he began to devote himself to the organisation of the peasantry in his home province of the U.P. By 1934, he had become one of the most important Congress leaders in U.P. and when the Congress Socialist Party was formed in that year he was asked to preside over the inaugural conference at Patna. From then onwards Acharya Narendra Deva, like Jayaprakash Narayan, was a towering figure in the Indian Socialist Movement. His assent became the necessary *imprimatur* to any important policy decision. Unlike Narayan, he remained a Marxist, a dialectical materialist and a believer in the class struggle and the use of violence, until the very end of his life.[30]

29. Acharya Narendra Deva, *RASTRIYATA AUR SAMAJVAD*, Banaras, pp. 673-691.
Also see Yusuf Meherally '*Acharya Narendra Deva*', in Acharya Narendra Deva's *Socialism and National Revolution*, Bombay, 1946, pp. vii-xvi.
G. S. Bhargava, *op. cit.*, pp. 26-30.

30. Myron Weiner, *Party Politics In India*, London, 1957, p. 35.

A man of much wider cultural interests than most of his colleagues in the Party, the Acharya was essentially an intellectual. His devotion to the pursuit of social and economic justice was complete and was the outcome of a subtle and refined intellectualism. It was his total absorption in the common cause that led him to accept in 1955 at Nagpur the responsibility of leading the Praja Socialist Party at a time when its fortunes had reached a critical phase by reason of the threatened secession of the Lohia group. That the Party did not hold together in 1955 was certainly no fault of Acharya Narendra Deva. It was a consequence of the inescapable chain of events following on the break-down of the Nehru-Narayan talks. But the Acharya's efforts to save the Socialist Movement from virtual disintegration did not fail completely, and wherever today the Praja Socialist Party is an organised force, a great deal of the credit for it must be given to his outstanding courage and determination.

Finally, we come to that stormy petrel and highly controversial figure in the Indian Socialist Movement, Dr. Ram Manohar Lohia.[31] Like Patwardhan, and unlike Narayan and Acharya Narendra Deva, he has not fallen under the spell of that Marxist ideology which has played such an important role in moulding the thought of the Indian Socialist Movement. Lohia was born in 1910 and after attending Banaras and Calcutta Universities he subsequently went to Germany for post-graduate studies. There in the late 1920s and early 1930s she witnessed the rise of Nazism. After his return to India Nehru put him in charge of the newly constituted Foreign Affairs Department of the All India Congress Committee. From then until the departure of the Socialists from the Congress in 1948, Lohia played an important part in shaping the emerging foreign policy of the Congress.

31. G. S. Bhargava, *op. cit.*, pp. 39-44.

It was in the office of the A. I. C. C. in 1939 that he first formulated his idea of a Third Camp in international affairs at a time when the Congress was faced with the dilemma of how to support the British Government in its war effort and at the same time achieve Indian independence. From 1948 until the fatal split in the Praja Socialist Party in 1955 which he himself did so much to bring about, Lohia was principal spokesman of the Socialists on foreign affairs, and during that period he played a principal part in the formation of the Asian Socialist Conference.

As a political leader, Dr. Lohia suffers from one overwhelming defect; he lacks discipline and the ability to work harmoniously with others. His extreme individualism has proved to be a crippling liability to the Socialists. Though he possesses a fresh and vigorous mind which has been responsible for many new and original activities—for instance, the formation of the Asian Socialist Conference at Rangoon—patience and perseverance have never been his strong points. He more than any other individual leader must be held responsible for the confusion and division that have recently reigned supreme within the Party.

At this stage we shall do no more than draw two conclusions from these brief biographies of the main Socialist leaders. First, as in the case of the Congress and the Communists the leaders of the Indian Socialist Party by social origin have tended to come from the westernised middle class. Secondly, each in his political outlook has tended to represent one of the three main ingredients that have contributed to give Indian Socialism its distinctive flavour—Marxism, Gandhism and Social Democracy. In so far as the Indian Socialist Party has had its hesitations, its crises and its failures, they can generally be traced to the difficulty of achieving a satisfying synthesis between these seemingly incompatible ingredients.

We have now sketched in the general environment in which an organised Socialist Party first took root in India. We have also said something about the origins and personalities of the main Socialist leaders. In the following pages we shall endeavour to trace the evolution of this Socialist Party through its various significant phases of growth. This will entail what at times may seem a surfeit of dreary dialectics, but the Indian Socialists like the Communists have been much given to this pursuit.

As it first saw the light in 1934 as the *Congress* Socialist Party and grew up within the Congress fold we shall first have to describe its relations both with the parent body and with other political groups during the closing phases of the colonial period. We shall then consider the 1942-48 phase which was marked by the winning of independence and which culminated in the Socialists' decision to hive off from the parent organisation, the Congress, and to try their fortunes with a quite separate and independent Socialist Party.

Between 1948 and 1952 the new Party had to adjust itself to a new situation. Having cut adrift from the Congress, it had to find its feet as a political force in the country. During this phase we shall have to examine the organisational problems it encountered as the necessary prelude to the fighting of the first general election in 1951-52. The Party's strategy and comparative failure at the elections will then be given separate treatment.

We shall then move on to consider the merger in 1952 between the Socialist Party and the Kisan Mazdoor Praja Party (Peasants, Workers and Tenants' Party) which brought into existence the Praja Socialist Party. After an examination of the problems the new Party has had to face and the vicissitudes through which it has passed, we shall conclude with an attempted assessment of the role the Party has played in Indian politics.

CHAPTER 2 THE CONGRESS SOCIALIST PARTY AND THE INDIAN NATIONAL CONGRESS. 1934-1942

The launching of the 'Quit India' movement in August 1942 marks the end of an epoch in the history of the Congress Socialist Party. Ever since its birth in 1934 the Party had struggled to get the Congress to adopt militant action against the British as the most effective method of ending British rule in India. Its advocacy of this policy had involved it in unremitting controversy with leading members of the Congress. This eight year old controversy came to an end on August 9, 1942 with the arrest in Bombay of all the members of the All India Congress Committee. The national movement was thus without either leadership or an active policy despite the fact that the country was everywhere in ferment and on the verge of revolutionary upheaval. The mass arrest of all the members of the A. I. C. C. gave the Congress Socialist Party at this juncture an admirable opportunity to prove the effectiveness of its own theory of struggle against British rule, and to justify its consistent condemnation of the Gandhian techniques of non-violence and satyagraha.

As we shall see, the C. S. P. did seize this opportunity and, mainly as a result of the leading role it played during this period, came to occupy a position of influence next only to that of the Congress in the post-war period. But it was able to give a lead to the country in 1942 and win support for militant action only because of the way in which it had prepared the ground for the adoption of such a policy during the preceding eight years.

These were years when it was in almost continual conflict with the Congress.

Conflict between the Congress and the C. S. P. was the result of both ideological and tactical disagreements. Though there was unanimity on the ultimate goal of the national movement, i. e. the winning of independence, this was so vague a term that it meant all things to all men, from the Marxist left wing to the followers of Mahatma Gandhi. And there was a no-man's land of contradictory and competing forces in between those two extreme viewpoints. As a result, only too often, the whole future of the national movement was entirely lost sight of. Apart from differences on the nature of the independence that was desired, conflict between the Congress and the C. S. P. also arose over the tactics to be pursued in the struggle. There was prolonged argument about the implementation of the 1935 Government of India Act, the organisation of peasants and workers as a force in the nationalist movement, the problem of how the Indian States were to be drawn into the national movement, and India's attitude to the Second World War.

Throughout this period, the socialist ideology of the leaders of the C. S. P. was obviously an important factor in determining the Party's attitude to all the above mentioned specific issues. So we ought to start with an examination of the various 'theses' which were published by the Socialists at this time. These 'theses' were hammered out from the deliberations of the periodic Party conferences, and may therefore be accepted as representative of the general opinion of the Party membership.

The influence of Marxian Socialism was very much in evidence from the very beginning. The Meerut Theses of January 1936 declared that :

> The Congress Socialist Party grew out of the experiences of the last two national struggles (the Civil Disobedience

Movements). It was formed at the end of the last Civil Disobedience Movement by such Congressmen as came to believe that a new orientation of the national movement had become necessary : along with a redefinition of its objectives and a revision of its methods.[1]

The Meerut statement of policy asserted that initiative to achieve these ends could be taken only by those who had a theoretical grasp of the directing forces of present day society. Such men could only be those Indians who had come under the influence of Marxian Socialism and who accepted its validity.[2] It was natural, therefore, that the organisation which had sprung up to meet the needs of the situation should call itself a 'Socialist' organisation.

In the same statement the relationship between the C. S. P. and the Indian National Congress was explained. It was recognised that the Congress represented the organised will of Indian nationalism.[3] And it was also recognised that in its desire to foster socialism there could be no question of the C. S. P. splitting the national movement. What was necessary was the reconciliation of socialism with nationalism. The word 'Congress' prefixed to 'Socialist' therefore signified the organic relationship which the Socialists felt their socialism should have with the national movement.[4]

Two conclusions may thus be drawn from the Meerut Theses. First, the Socialists were also sincere nationalists. Secondly, the founders of the Party were inspired and influenced

1. *Statement of Policy of the Congress Socialist Party*, Meerut, 1936.
2. *Ibid.*
3. Acharya Narendra Deva, *Socialism and National Revolution*, Bombay, 1946, p. 9.
4. Asoka Mehta emphasised this point in conversation with the present writer.

by Marxian Socialism. It was because of this second fact that they tended to disagree on almost every major issue with the liberal minded leadership of the Congress and the followers of Mahatma Gandhi during both the colonial and post-independence periods.

The influence of Marxism was very much in evidence in the programme of the Party adopted at its Conference at Bombay in January 1934. The main socialist objectives were stated to be :

(1) The transfer of all power to the producing masses.
(2) The socialisation of key industries and public utilities (e.g. plantations, mines, banks, steel, cotton, jute, railways, shipping and insurance) with a view to the progressive socialisation of all institutions of production, distribution and exchange.
(3) State monopoly of foreign trade.
(4) Elimination of Princes and Landlords and all other classes of exploiters, without compensation.
(5) Redistribution of land amongst the peasants and the liquidation of peasant indebtedness.
(6) Recognition of the right to work or maintenance by the State.
(7) The production and distribution of goods to be based on the principle of ' to everyone according to his needs'.[5]

Three years earlier, at its Karachi session in 1931, the Congress,largely through the initiative of Nehru,had passed its famous Fundamental Rights resolution,[6] which has sometimes been taken as indicative of a socialist trend within the Congress at that time.

5. *Programme of the Congress Socialist Party*, Bombay, 1934.
6. The Karachi Fundamental Rights are printed in Jawaharlal Nehru : *The Unity of India*, London, 1941, p. 406.

But we have only to compare the Fundamental Rights listed at Karachi with the C. S. P's Bombay programme to see how far the former fell short of the Socialists' radical policy.

The Karachi resolution was silent, for instance, on the question of the elimination of landlordism, princely states and ' other classes of exploiters '. It observed a similar silence on the issues of peasant indebtedness and on land redistribution amongst the peasants. Instead it vaguely declared that ' the system of land tenure and revenue and rent shall be reformed and an equitable adjustment made of the burden on agricultural land ' and promised ' the giving of relief to the small peasants by rent reduction and exemption '.

Only on the question of nationalisation was the Karachi resolution in any sense socialist in approach, but here too there were qualifications and limitations, it merely being declared that ' the state shall own or control key industries and services, mineral resources, railways, waterways, shipping and other means of transport '. Two significant features about this statement might be noted. First, there was only a general statement about industries and no detailed mention of what constituted key industries. Secondly, the phrase ' own or control ' is interesting as this was destined to become the official policy of the Congress government in the post-independence period under the system of 'mixed economy '. And a discreet silence was maintained as to exactly what would be the position of landlords, princes and industrialists if a nationalisation policy demanded the taking over of their property. As subsequent events in the post-independence period were to show, the right wing Congress leaders were certainly not thinking in terms of expropriation without handsome compensation for vested interests.

From this comparison between the Karachi and Bombay programmes, it is clear there was only the vaguest hint of

socialism in the resolution on Fundamental Rights at the Karachi session of the Congress. That of course was inevitable when we take into account the motley collection of landlords, industrialists and middle cl , leaders who either composed the leadership of Congress or who had influence in it at that time. The Karachi resolution caused little stir because it had no teeth in it; it was certainly not a manifesto in favour of a socialist India.

On the other hand, the Socialists with their Bombay p rogramme of 1934 did declare themselves, without equivocation, in favour of the achievement of a socialists society in India.

The Socialists' Plan of Action

From the outset, the Socialists' strategy was to work both inside and outside the Congress. Dedicated work inside the Congress was considered vital in order 'to develop it into a real anti-imperialist organisation'. Outside the Congress, the aim was to organise peasants and workers and to try to capture any resulting organisations that might be formed. The creation and control of Youth Leagues, Womens' and Volunteer organisations was also considered essential as a means of winning widespread support for the programme of the Party. The whole Socialist strategy was to be directed towards the fostering of a powerful mass movement for the achievement of independence and socialism, and the main tactics of the Socialists were to be actual participation in the day to day struggles of the peasants and workers and the intensification of the class struggle everywhere.

The Socialists' analysis at this time of the nature of the struggle for national freedom and the tactics to be followed were

the outcome of their Marxist beliefs.[7] They never contemplated that the British would leave India and grant it real independence. They were convinced that the 'capitalist' and 'imperialist' ruling classes would go on exploiting colonies simply because the whole capitalist system demanded it.[8] Parliamentary institutions were simply clever devices to foster and perpetuate religious and minority divisions in Indian society, thus still further entrenching British rule.[9] The example of the two Round Table Conferences was before them and strengthened them in this belief.

This analysis, coupled with the Leninist doctrine of converting anti-imperialist struggle into anti-capitalist struggle,[10] led the Socialists to advance the theory of an 'alternative leadership' which it was their particular mission to give to the nationalist movement in place of the liberal bourgeois leadership of the Indian National Congress. Accordingly, it was essential to 'wean' the anti-imperialist elements in the Congress away from the bourgeois leadership and to bring them under the leadership of 'revolutionary socialism'.[11]

This policy of not only challenging the leadership of the Congress but of endeavouring to build up the Congress Socialist Party as an alternative organisation to the Congress was pursued by the Party from 1934 to 1936. But to achieve such aims the leaders recognised that they would have to tread warily in their

7. *Statement of Policy of the Congress Socialist Party*, Meerut, 1936. See also, *Faizpur Policy Statement of the Congress Socialist Party*, 1936.
8. V. I. Lenin, *The Imperialist, War, Collected Works*, Vol., XVIII, London, 1930, p. 221.
9. Jayaprakash Narayan, *Towards Struggle*, Bombay, 1946, p. 117.
10. V. I. Lenin, *op. cit.*, pp. 223-24.
11. *Meerut Policy Statement.*

relations with Congress. The Meerut Theses for instance declared that :

> ....the Party should take only an anti-imperialist stand on the Congress platforms. We should not in this connection make the mistake of placing a full socialist programme before the Congress. An anti-imperialist programme should be evolved for this purpose suited to the needs of the workers, peasants and the lower middle classes.[12]

On the other hand, the Party ' must carry on socialist propaganda from its own platform systematically and vigorously '.

At the Faizpur Conference of the C. S. P. in December 1936, the idea of an ' alternative ' leadership was taken a stage further. It was now stressed that ' a gradual, and as far as possible, amicable change should be brought about in the composition of its (i. e. the Congress) leadership and programme '. The task before the Party was now conceived to be ' not only to wean away the anti-imperialist elements from the bourgeois leadership ', but also ' to develop and broaden ' the Congress itself so as to transform it into a powerful ' anti-imperialist front .'[13]

The Party thus set itself a more significant objective. It is probable that it got this idea of ' broadening ' the Congress and of transforming into an anti-imperialist ' front ' from the Communist International in whose vocabulary the term ' front ' was now becoming prominent. And the fact that the Indian Communists were now becoming more enthusiastic about joining forces with the Socialists and working inside the Congress might have inspired the C. S. P. leaders to think along these lines and to want ' a complete reorganisation of the Congress ....from the bottom upwards '.

12. *Faizpur Policy Statement.*
13. *Ibid.*

It was recognised that to achieve such a reorganisation action would have to be taken both inside and outside the Congress. According to the Faizpur Theses,the whole organisational structure of the Congress would need to be changed. Its constitution ought to be 'democratised' so as to give more initiative to the primary members and committees, and the enlargement and 'enlivenment' of its membership was considered essential. For this purpose, the socialists envisaged the affiliated membership of mass bodies of peasants and workers.

But here it was recognised there was likely to be opposition from Congress leaders. So the C. S. P. planned at first to work amongst peasants, workers and students outside, and independently of, the Congress but with the ultimate purpose of later establishing close links with these mass organisations and the Congress Committees. This C. S. P. strategy to secure the association of mass organisations with Congress by virtue of the device of affiliated membership and by preparatory work from below called 'joint work' was probably adopted on the model of Communist strategy.

Finally, because it was believed that 'the conscious leadership of the anti-imperialist movement fell to the socialist forces', which it was admitted were unfortunately still divided, an agreement between them on the basis of a minimum programme for action was considered essential. Only thus would it be possible to work towards an eventual 'organic unity' and a 'united party'.

The idea of a united party or a united front of all 'leftist' elements was thus a definite objective of the Socialists at this time. Their whole programme was to provide the national movement with an alternative programme, leadership and organisation, and by their propaganda and political activity force the Congress adopt their policy. The unsuccessful attempts of the Socialists

to create a united front with the other left wing groups will be considered in Chapter III.

Attitude of the C. S. P. and the Congress to the Government of India Act, 1935

The C. S. P. was hostile to the 1935 Act from the very beginning, having declared its unequivocal opposition to the proposals of the Joint Parliamentary Commission on which the Act was based.[14] But the Congress leaders, though they too condemned the constitution as quite unsatisfactory, did not ban the entry of its members to the legislatures, since it was their intention to fight the new constitution from within. The Congress leadership, however, did not make its position clear beforehand over the question of 'office acceptance', i. e. whether Congress members should be allowed to become Ministers in the provincial governments.

As is well known, the Congress in 1937 fought the elections and won an absolute majority in six out of eleven provinces. It then proceeded, with the help of other groups, to form Ministries in seven provinces. The Socialists acquiesced in the decision of the Congress to participate in the elections and, indeed, they materially assisted the Congress candidates in their electioneering. Some of them also stood as candidates, notably Acharya Narendra Deva, in the United Provinces.

It was over the question of 'office acceptance' that the most bitter controversy arose between the C. S. P. and the Congress. The Socialists' attitude, as explained by P. T. Das, was that 'office acceptance' i. e. the coming into being of the Congress

14. Narayan, *op. cit.*, pp. 118-122.
See also the resolution of the Faizpur Conference on the Government of India Act, *Modern Review*, Calcutta, January, 1937, p. 122.

Ministries, would prevent the growth of that 'revolutionary mentality' which the Party was seeking to foster at this time. The C. S. P. was quite opposed to this course :

> ....not because it wanted to take up an impossible position, but because it felt that the mentality behind office acceptance was incapable of making any revolutionary use of office. Our criticism was amply justified by the events after the outbreak of war.[15]

Nevertheless, the All India Congress Committee at Delhi on March 18, 1937 decided in favour of office acceptance in provinces where Congress had a majority in the legislature. One condition however was laid down :

> The Ministership shall not be accepted unless the leader of the Congress Party in the legislature is satisfied and is able to state publicly that the Governor will not use his special powers of interference, or set aside the advice of Ministers in regard to their constitutional activities.[16]

But as the Government of India at this time had consistently refused to give any such assurances with regard to the exercise of the Governors' reserve powers, the above mentioned condition insisted on by Congress was valueless. It was simply a Congress device for saving face.

At the Delhi meeting of the A. I. C. C., Jayaprakash Narayan moved an amendment on behalf of the Socialists and other left wingers to the effect that there should be no office acceptance, but he was defeated by 135 votes to 78, and the original motion in favour was carried by 127 to 70.

The Socialists felt that a serious mistake had been made and outside the Congress they therefore co-operated in the

15. *Janata*, Vol, 1, No. 13, April 18, 1946.
16. *Report of the All India Congress Committee, Allahabad*, 1937.

formation of an Anti-Ministry Committee headed by Sardar Singh Caveeshwar, which waged 'a raging and tearing campaign' against office acceptance. The C. S. P. maintained its stand on this issue for some time. But at the Lahore Conference of the Party in 1938 the Socialists became less obstructive. They declared that although they still held to their originalp osition, they did not 'intend to embarrass or create difficulties for the Congress Ministries, but desired to strengthen them and help them in carrying out the Congress election manifesto'.[17] But this change of attitude was largely a result of the changed atmosphere at the Haripura Congress session following on the resignation of the U. P. and Bihar Congress Ministries over the question of the release of political prisoners.

Relations between the C. S. P. and the Congress Ministries

Conflict between the C. S. P. and the Congress Ministries first arose over the provincial budgets, the Socialists wanting more relief for the peasants and workers. Though not opposed in principle to the C. S. P's demands, the Congress Ministries were reluctant to make concessions. Indeed, in many cases they went out of their way to appease the landlords.

This Congress complaisance towards landlord interests was vigorously opposed by the C. S. P. and other left wing groups, notably by the Kisan or Peasant Movement which had made considerable headway during the 1930s. Indeed, to such effect that in 1936 there was convened at Meerut an All India Kisan Congress, the sponsors being the C. S. P. Conference and certain peasant leaders. The outcome of this initial meeting was the holding of further Kisan Congresses at Lucknow and Faizpur.

17. *Resolution of the Lahore Conference of the Congress Socialist Party*, and M. N. Mitra, *Indian Annual Register*, Calcutta, 1938, p. 393.

The growing influence of the Kisan movement had its repercussions on the Congress, which was afraid that this movement might be captured by the left wing and thus lead to demands being put forward by the peasants which the landlord interests within Congress would not be prepared to concede. At the Lucknow Congress in 1936 a 'Mass Contact' Committee was set up to devise ways and means of bringing Kisans and Mazdoors (workers) into the Congress, but owing to differences which arose at an early stage of the Committee's existence, it never submitted a report.

The C. S. P. leaders at first regarded the 'Mass Contact Committee as a ruse by the Congress to play down the Socialists' demand for the collective affiliation of peasants and workers organisations to the Congress, since the Congress leaders obviously thought any 'Mass Contact' established would be under their supervision.

Nevertheless, the General Secretary of the C. S. P., Jayaprakash Narayan, was convinced that 'Mass Contact' if under C. S. P. direction might greatly increase the prospects of the Party. If, for instance, they could bring a large body of Kisan recruits into the Party, they could greatly strengthen their position at Congress elections. Instructions to this effect were therefore sent to all C. S. P. provincial organisations.[18]

The impact of the radical climate of thought created by the peasant movement is further illustrated by the Kisan Congress of December 1936, which was held under C. S. P. auspices at Faizpur at the very time when the A. I. C. C. was meeting in that city. At that time, the A. I. C. C. had certainly not anticipated having to formulate an agrarian policy, but as a result of the

18. *Report of the Third Conference of the Congress Socialist Party*, Bombay, 1936.

pressures exerted by the C. S. P. Conference and Kisan Congress at Faizpur, the Congress Working Committee felt itself obliged to send to the A. I. C. C. definite proposals for agrarian reform. On their acceptance, these proposals became known as the Faizpur Agrarian Programme.

Kisan pressure on the Congress continued steadily from that time onwards. At the A. I. C. C. meeting in Delhi in April 1937, already referred to, when the Congress decided in favour of office acceptance, this proposal was strongly opposed by all Kisan Congress members of the A. I. C. C. as well as by the Socialists. Moreover, after the entry into office of the Congress Ministries, the Kisan Sabha (as the Kisan Congress had by then come to be known) demanded the implementation of the Faizpur Agrarian Programme by the various Congress provincial governments. As the Congress Ministries were reluctant to take any action, the Kisan Sabha launched a campaign of agitation for agrarian reform.

The resulting conflict between Congress and the Kisan Sabha was especially acute in Bihar where the Ministry had introduced a Tenancy Bill in the provincial legislature the purpose of which was to give some relief to the peasants. But in the Select Committee on the Bill it was considerably watered down in order to meet the wishes of the local Zamindars, who were strongly opposed to the Bihar Congress Ministry over this specific tenancy issue. The Bihar Kisan Sabha protested against this 'surrender to the enemies of the Kisans' by a Congress government, pointing out that :

(1) The Bill had originally laid down that the fixing of rents should be determined both by price levels and by certain other considerations. The amended version of the Bill made prices the only criterion.

(2) The Provisions regarding the reversion of land to evicted peasants had been dropped.

(3) Illegal eviction by Zamindars, which had been made a cognizable offence in the original Bill, had now been made not only non-cognizable but also bailable and compoundable.

(4) The provision against the sale of homesteads for the failure to pay rent had virtually been deleted from the Bill.[19]

These modifications in the original provisions of the Tenancy Bill had been the result of an agreement between the Bihar Congress Ministry and the Zamindars of the province. As a result of winning such concessions in Bihar, as well as in other parts of the country, the landlords felt strong enough to take an increasingly strong line against the peasant movement. The Kisan Sabha thereupon decided to retaliate and once again Bihar was in the lead.

This time the controversy arose over the use of the *danda*, the bamboo stick, used by the Kisans to defend themselves in the periodic demonstrations that occurred. The president of the Bihar Kisan Sabha defended the use of the *danda* as a necessary measure of self-defence for the peasants, and maintained that this was completely in accordance with the Gandhian principle of non-violence. This argument however was not accepted by Mahatma Gandhi.

The Bihar Congress Committee in the end decided to take action against those Congressmen who had been associated with the Kisan demonstrations in that province, a decision which caused a sharp reaction in C. S. P. circles. Jayaprakash Narayan voiced this feeling when he said that :

19. N. G. Ranga and Swami Sahajanand Saraswati, *History of the Kisan Movement*, Madras, 1939, pp. 91-2.

If the Congress authorities were to be so unwise as to take disciplinary action, the Kisan Sabhites would have to part company with the Congress, just as Lokmanya Tilak had to in the past[20].

However, the Congress Working Committee approved the action taken by the Bihar Congress Committee and warned Congress members that anything they did to create an atmosphere of violence rendered them liable to disciplinary action. At the same time, the Working Committee authorised the Bihar Congress Committee to take any action it might consider necessary.

This obvious lack of sympathy for the Kisans' case provoked further criticism from the Socialist leaders. They alleged that Congress policy was dictated by the desire to appease the Zamindars, to smooth the path for harassed provincial Congress Ministries and to oust the left wingers from the Congress. The action taken by the Working Committee in Bihar seemed to be part of a nation-wide offensive of the right wing of Congress against the growing forces of the left. The right wing wanted to divorce parliamentary activity from mass agitation and struggle which would be disastrous. The C. S. P. leaders pointed to the growing membership of the Kisan Sabhas ; the enrolment that year promised to equal the membership of the Congress itself, i.e. 500,000.[21] The very strength of the movement in the Congress leaders' eyes had thus become its chief offence.

In a self-critical analysis the Socialist leaders blamed themselves for their own failure to organise the peasant masses. All that they had succeeded in doing was to win a certain amount of influence in the upper committees of the Congress. They had quite failed to get the lower units of Congress either to declare

20. A. P. Sinha, *Congress Socialist*, Vol. III, No. 6, Feb. 1938.
21. *Imperialist Instigation*, anon. *Janata*, Jan. 1938. pp. 78-83.

in favour of the Kisan Sabha or protest against the Congress working Committee's decision.[22] Effective pressure on the 'anti-struggle leaders' of Congress could come only from the rank and file of that organisation. Such pressure, coupled with the strength of the Kisans themselves 'would break the back of the anti-unity elements', however influential they might be.[23] If these tactics failed, the C. S. P. would even be prepared to split the Congress. The Socialists' irritation with the Congress over the Bihar affair was well summed up in the challenge issued by Jayaprakash Narayan :

> Gandhism has played its part. It cannot carry us further and hence we must march and be guided by the ideology of socialism. We may suffer political persecution at the hands of the Congress and even be driven out of it, but a day will come when the Congress will become ours.
>
> I have faith in the masses and so as we are working for them we need not fear anybody. However, if the Rightists succeed in monopolising the Congress by mechanically keeping the masses apart from the organisation, we will then have to organise another Congress which would take up the political and economic struggles of the masses.[24]

What looked like a grave crisis between Congress and C. S. P. leaders was however averted. When the Congress held its session at Haripura in 1938, there was a noticeable change of atmosphere. By this time the Congress Ministry in Bihar had resigned over the question of the release of political prisoners. Moreover, Subhas Chandra Bose, who was considered to belong to the left wing at that time, was now President of the Congress. The Socialists therefore felt they were in the ascendant.

22. *Ibid.*
23. *Ibid.*
24. A. P. Sinha, *op. cit.*

At the Haripura Congress meeting it was conceded by a specific resolution that the Kisans' movement was an integral part of the nationalist movement. It was stated very surprisingly that the Congress was, in the main, a Kisan organisation and that as such it must champion the peasants' grievances. To satisfy their just claims and to achieve political independence it was essential to strengthen the Congress by bringing more and more Kisans into it. This resolution seemed to suggest a change of heart on the part of the Congress. But all it really expressed was the growing fear of the right wing of Congress that the Kisan Sabha was out-bidding it for the support of the Indian peasantry. Moreover, despite its avowed support for the Kisans, the Congress leaders quite clearly did not intend the Socialists to steal their thunder. Whilst reaffirming the right of the Kisans to organise, the Congress resolution imposed the following reservation :

> While fully recognising the right of the Kisans to organise Kisan Sabhas, the Congress cannot associate itself with any activities which are incompatible with the basic principles of the Congress, and will not countenance any of the activities of those Congressmen who, as members of the Kisan Sabhas, help in creating an atmosphere hostile to Congress principles and policy. The Congress therefore calls upon Provincial Congress Committees to bear the above in mind . . . . .and to take suitable action wherever called for.[25]

The Haripura resolution, in other words, insisted that the peasant struggle was to be carried on under ' the banner ' of Congress itself.

This struggle between the Congress and the Socialists to control or influence the peasant movement, with the former in favour of doing nothing that might antagonise the landlords,

25. Sitaramayya, *op. cit.*, Vol. 2, p. 82.

and the latter favouring a militant policy designed to bring large numbers of peasants into the Congress by the techniques of ' Mass Contact ' and ' Collective Affiliation ' gradually died away. Soon after the Haripura resolution the Socialist leaders realised it would prove too difficult a task to change the organisational structure of the Congress in this way. By the time of the C. S. P. Conference at Delhi in 1939 Jayaprakash Narayan had dropped the claims for both ' Mass Action ' and ' Collective Affiliation '.[26]

Another matter which at first seemed likely to lead to discord between the Congress and the C. S. P. during this period was the question of the release of political prisoners. It would not be true to say that the Congress High Command or the Congress Ministries were less sincere over this issue than the Socialists. The difficulty was that the Congress tried to get the prisoners released by negotiation and this inevitably led to delay in achieving results. As Congress efforts proved futile in the face of opposition from the Governors in every province, the Socialists became extremely critical of the whole idea of negotiation.

Largely as a result of the Socialists' pressure the problem of the political prisoners was finally resolved by the resignation of the Congress Ministries in Bihar and the United Provinces. This gesture of protest had the desired effect on the Governors concerned and the prisoners were released. As the Haripura Congress endorsed the stand of the Congress Ministries, the C. S. P. leaders had nothing left to complain about on this issue.[27]

Indeed, at their Lahore Conference the Socialists were warmly appreciative of Congress action. They praised the ' firmness' with which the Congress Ministers had resisted the interference of the Governors in the day to day administration of the United

26. N. N. Mitra, *Indian Annual Register*, 1939, Vol. II, pp. 361-62.
27. Sitaramayya, *op. cit.*, pp. 82-85.

Provinces and Bihar, and had nothing but praise for the way in which the Congress had 'brought about a ministerial crisis on the issue of the release of the political prisoners'. In a sudden flood of emotion, and forgetting their own past resolution and pronouncements condemning the Congress, the Socialists in their Lahore resolution declared that the Congress had justified the confidence placed in it by the Indian people at the 1937 election. Its recent triumph over the political prisoners issue had consolidated its position in the country and raised its prestige and status abroad. The Lahore resolution concluded by declaring that though the C. S. P. was against office acceptance and still held to that view, and although it believed in the need for vigilant criticism within Congress, it not only did not intend to embarrass or create difficulties for the Congress Ministeries, but wanted to see them as strong as possible so that they could carry out their election pledges. Jayaprakash Narayan was especially conciliatory at the Delhi C. S. P. Conference and denied the charge that the C. S. P. was seeking to split the Congress. The Party had no quarrel with the Congress 'as a political organisation'; it was simply that the Socialists believed that the Congress programme was not sufficiently advanced'.[28]

Another source of periodic disagreement between the Congress and the C. S. P. in the 1930s was the question of what policy was to be adopted towards the Indian States. This was an issue causing much controversy right up to the achievement of independence. Briefly, there was the view of the right wing leaders who were scared of antagonising the Princes and landlords in the States, and there was the view of the left wing that the States were an indissoluble part of the Indian nation and that therefore the States' peoples struggle should be brought within the nationalist movement.

28. N. N. Mitra, *op. cit.*, 1939, Vol. 2 p. 362.

The right wing view stressed 'the unpreparedness of people in the States' for revolutionary struggle. It was held that the Congress techniques of struggle were unsuited to the States. The many limitations and restrictions imposed by the Rulers and by the British authorities working through them seriously hampered Congress activities. It could not be in keeping with the prestige of the Congress to set up Committees in the States and then find that they were powerless to function. Nor could insults to the Congress flag be tolerated. Owing to the reactionary nature of the Princes' rule there was a sense of helplessness and disillusion amongst the peoples of the States which Congress interference could do little to diminish.

These arguments carried little weight with the Socialists. They emphasised that the so-called difficulties involved in working in the States which the right wing so much emphasised were by no means unique to the States alone. Similar problems confronted the Congress all over the provinces of British India. The fact was the right wing, as in the case of its attitude to the Indian bourgeoise in the provinces was frightened of opposing the landlord interests in the States. The C. S. P. regarded the agitation inside the States as inseparable from the total struggle of the Indian people and therefore not to be postponed or neglected.

At the Haripura Congress session in 1938 the controversy between right and left wings over the Indian States led to an attempted compromise resolution. It declared that 'Purna Swaraj' (complete independence) must be achieved for the whole of India. But whilst Congress welcomed and pledged support for the States' peoples struggle, it was better to limit itself to the giving of moral support rather than officially leading the movement. Congress Committees established in the States should function under the direction and control of the Working Committee but they should not launch direct action under the

auspices of the Congress. The movement in the States should be built up by the peoples themselves, though freedom would be given to individual Congressmen to conduct agitation inside the States on their own responsibility.[29]

The C. S. P. deplored this ambiguous attitude towards the struggle in the States. At its Lahore Conference in 1938, the Party reaffirmed its determination to organise and support the struggle of the people in the States 'for democratic rights and human economic conditions,' thus making the movement an organic part of the whole struggle against imperialism. The Socialists felt that the Congress was deserting the peoples in the States in their hour of need, M. R. Masani, for instance, ironically remarked that :

> ....the people of the Indian States, who form a fourth of the nation, are told to fight on their own and to expect no direct aid from the people of British India.[30]

The Socialists continued to take a prominent part in organising agitation in the States, actively co-operating with the States' Peoples' Conference, the counter-part of the Indian National Congress.

The Second World War

By 1938 the threat of European war was casting lengthening shadows over India. The Indian leaders were both convinced of the imminence of war and worried about the extent to which India would be committed by virtue of its importance to the British imperial defence system. The Congress at its Haripura session in 1938 therefore felt obliged to state its policy towards

29. Sitaramayya, *op. cit.* pp. 79-80.
30. *Report of the Lahore Conference of the Congress Socialist Party, Bombay*, 1938.

the question of Indian co-operation in the event on an outbreak of hostilities.

The Congress expressed the desire of all Indians to live in peace and friendship with all countries and emphasised that whilst striving for their own freedom and independence as a nation, Indians desired to respect the freedom of others. But as the main roots of international conflict lay in the desire of certain nations to dominate others, for enduring world peace to be established, imperialism and the exploitation of subject peoples, must be brought to an end. India could be no party to an imperialist war and would not permit her manpower and resources to be exploited in the interests of British imperialism. The Congress thus inevitably condemned all the war preparations which were being made by the British in India at this time.[31]

Anti-imperialism continued to be the guiding general principle of Congress policy towards the Second World War. But various attempts were made on both sides to achieve a compromise so as to enable India to co-operate voluntarily with the Allied powers. The liberal minded leadership of the Congress found itself divided as never before over this issue of voluntary co-operation. It was a division that knew no ideological bounds and which cut across every party alike at some time or other. Many of the leading Congressmen found themselves with what amounted to split minds. On the one hand, there was a strong urge to exploit the situation in order to further the interests of the independence movement; on the other hand, with their liberal education and ideas they appreciated only too clearly the dangers of a Fascist victory. How then was it possible to reconcile their antagonism to British imperialism with their antagonism to Fascism ? The Congress leaders were faced by a dilemma they never succeeded in resolving.

31. Sitaramayya, *op. cit.*, p. 86.

There was less uncertainty at the outset amongst the Socialists and the Communists. As we shall see in the next chapter when we come to consider the C. S. P's relations with the Communists, both major left wing groups regarded the war as an imperialist struggle being fought for the prosecution of imperialist interests. In accordance with their Leninist ideology there seemed to be an excellent opportunity to exploit an imperialist struggle for the establishment of socialism in India. So the left wingers wanted the Congress to start another Civil Disobedience Movement but on a much larger scale than ever before. And by and large, public opinion was on their side.

The Congress High Command fully recognised that it could not allow the opportunity of leading the nationalist struggle at this crucial stage pass into the hands of the left wing forces. On the other hand, because of the many fruitless efforts the Congress leaders made to come to an understanding with the British Government, they laid themselves open to the reiterated charges of the left wingers that they were disastrously compromising the nationalist movement. The Congress Working Committee strongly defended itself against left wing criticism, but it was inevitably compromised by the honesty of Mahatma Gandhi who had openly confessed that in accordance with the doctrine of Satyagraha he was not 'spoiling for a fight' with the British :

> Whatever may be true of the members of the Working Committee, I wholly agree with Subhas Babu's charge that I am eager to have a compromise with British, if it can be had with honour.[32]

32. Gandhi to Bose, N. N. Mitra, *Indian Annual Register*, 1940, Vol. I, p. 31.
Socialist Attitude, 1946, II, p. 224.

But all possibility of an honourable compromise did vanish. Accordingly the All India Congress Committee, meeting at Bombay on August 15, 1940 requested the Mahatma to resume the leadership of the Congress in order 'to guide it to its final destiny'. The Mahatma's demand for absolute loyalty to his particular methods of struggle met with suitable assurances from the A. I. C. C.

The technique of struggle that the Mahatma had in mind was scarcely likely to appeal to the Socialists and the Communists. In a statement issued on March 25, 1940 he had made it clear that the kind of struggle he had in mind was not Civil Disobedience either 'direct or indirect'. Satyagrahis would be expected to devote themselves to such modest activities as spinning, visiting primary members of Congress and inducing them to use Khadi and keeping a diary of their daily activities.

Gandhi justified his policy of not starting a Civil Disobedience Movement against the British by his own peculiar logic. He held that any action, even though symbolically restricted to one man, could be effective in the coming struggle, provided that action had the united will of the nation behind it. It was in accordance with this belief that he nominated Vinoba Bhave as the first Satyagrahi on October 5, 1940. This choice is difficult to understand as Bhave at this time was little known outside the Mahatma's Ashram and Gandhi had to introduce him to the public in a special statement. The left wingers were convinced that the Mahatma did not really want to start a mass agitation at all, and therefore selected a little known disciple as the first Satyagrahi so that less excitement would be aroused amongst the masses.

The Socialists regarded Mahatma Gandhi's whole attitude as Civil Disobedience as most unsatisfactory. They had no doubt in their minds about what action all patriotic Indians

should adopt in the coming struggle. They wanted real Civil Disobedience supported by widespread student boycotts and workers' strikes. Jayaprakash Narayan at this juncture pointed out that the Socialists had never accepted Mahatma Gandhi's 'constructive programme' as the only possible weapon or indeed as even an effective weapon in the independence struggle. They had never wavered in their belief in militant action, and when they contemplated the vacillating leadership in the present crisis, they were more than ever convinced of the correctness of their diagnosis.[33] Such views of course saddened the heart of the Mahatma. But the Socialists were by now no longer prepared to submit to his criticism and therefore went ahead with their campaign against the war effort of the Government of India.

As a result, most of the Socialists were imprisoned during 1940 and 1941 under the Defence of India Act and were therefore not present at the fateful 'Quit India' meeting of the All India Congress Committee on August 7 and 8, 1942. By that time every effort to achieve an 'honourable compromise' between the Congress and the British Government had failed and the Congress leaders had no option but to launch a campaign of 'mass non-violence'. But the A. I. C. C. which had assembled at Bombay to decide the date for starting the campaign and to draw up an actual plan of action could not do so because all its members were arrested on August 9, 1942. With their detention along with scores of other Congressmen all over the country, the national movement was left without a central leadership and a definite programme of action.

33. Sitaramayya, *op. cit.* p. 180.

CHAPTER 3 THE CONGRESS SOCIALIST PARTY AND THE INDIAN COMMUNIST PARTY 1934-42

A matter of great importance during the formative period of the Congress Socialist Party from 1934 to 1942 was its relations with the various left wing groups. The story of these relations at times makes very strange reading, being often akin to both tragedy and comedy. As it was the C. S. P. and the Communist Party which dominated left wing politics at this time, we shall devote most of our attention to these two groups. Only one other group, that of M. N. Roy is worthy of notice, and for the sake of convenience this will be considered first.

When the C. S. P. was formed in 1934, the Communist Party and the Roy Group were already in existence, so it was inevitable that as an organised expression of left wing thought, it should have been regarded as something of an intruder. Nevertheless, there was really a considerable measure of agreement in outlook between all three left wing groups. The C. S. P. had declared its belief in scientific socialism as propounded by Marx and Engels, it professed warm sympathy for the Soviet Union and it claimed to derive its inspiration from the same fountain as the Indian Communists, i. e. the socialist experiment in the Soviet Union. On the immediate aims of the nationalist movement there also seemed, at least on the surface, to be broad agreement between the left wing groups. All of them believed in militant action against the British Raj in India, and there was very little difference between them as regards their attitudes towards Gandhism and the Gandhian technique of struggle for the achievement of independence.

In short, in view of the extent of apparent agreement that existed between them, one might have expected all the left wing groups to consolidate themselves into one political organisation. Attempts, in fact were made to unite, but as we shall see, after an uneasy co-operation they fell apart, and subsequently became even more critical of one another than of those forces which they professed to combat. We should therefore devote some space to considering the reasons for this failure to achieve left wing unity in the colonial period. To take the Roy group first.

M. N. Roy, after his escapades in China and Russia and his subsequent expulsion from the Communist International in 1929 came back to India and gathered around himself a following which became known as the Roy Group. But as he was soon arrested and sentenced to a term of ten years' imprisonment his guidance was not available to his followers when the problem arose as to whether they were to co-operate or not with the newly created Congress Socialist Party.

On their own initiative, however, the Royists welcomed the new Party and even joined it. When Roy was released in 1936 and discovered what had happened, he immediately expressed his opposition to the C. S. P. Indeed, he was hostile to the whole idea of the formation of a left wing party inside the Congress, maintaining that such a party should be outside that organisation. And it could only be called a Communist Party, since a genuine socialist party could not be called anything else.[1]

Roy's followers, however, continued to remain in the C. S. P. for some time despite their leader's indictment of it. Relations with Roy became even more strained after the Meerut Conference of the C. S. P. There a document came into

1. M. N. Roy, *Letters to the Congress Socialist Party*. Bombay, 1937.

the possession of the Socialists in which Roy was reputed to have stated that a party like the C. S. P. was completely superfluous in the circumstances of India at that time, and that the sooner it was wound up the better it would be for the country. This document was disowned by the Royists at the meeting of the National Executive of the C. S. P. at Meerut, but letters written at various times by Roy to the C. S. P. clearly indicate its authenticity.

Roy disbelieved that a socialist party could be of much use in a colonial situation. The essential task of any political organisation, in such circumstances, should be the winning of independence and it should therefore be called a party of 'national democratic revolution'. Roy advised the C. S. P. not to function as a separate party within the Congress, but to offer itself as an 'alternative leadership'.[2]

The C. S. P., on the other hand, never paid much attention to Roy's arguments and continued with its policy of endeavouring to build up its strength within the Cogress. Later on, as differences with Roy became more acute, the latter advised his followers to withdraw from the C. S. P., hoping-wrongly, of course that the resignation of his supporters would publicise the C.S.P's imminent disintegration.

It is doubtful if the C. S. P. could ever have come to any real understanding with Roy. There were two fundamental points of disagreement between them. First, the elections under the 1935 Government of India Act, and secondly, the question of co-operation with the British war effort in India. On both these issues Roy maintained that it was in the national interest to co-operate with the British, a viewpoint anathema to the Socialists. The support which Roy gave the British was

2. *Ibid.*, p. 11.

certainly very damaging to his reputation as a political leader. Though he continued to be something of a legendary figure in India, he never recovered from his loss of prestige in the post-war period. Thus the 'Roy Group' which had been built around him, and which later on was transformed into the Radical Democratic Party of India, disintegrated after independence without much notice.

Roy and his followers never played any significant role in Indian politics. It is to the much more important relationship between the C. S. P. and the Communist Party to which we should now turn if we wish to get some insight into the causes of the failure to achieve left wing unity in this period.

There were clearly fundamental differences between the Communist and Socialist approaches to the nationalist movement, despite adherence to a common Marxist ideology. These differences were well illustrated by the divergence in outlook on the role of the Congress. The Socialists always considered the Congress as the one great representative organisation leading the independence movement. The foremost task before every Indian citizen was to fight for national independence, and that meant joining the Congress. The Socialists recognised that the existing stage of the Indian struggle was that of 'bourgeois democratic revolution,' and therefore thought it would be suicidal to cut themselves off from the whole upsurge of nationalism of which the Congress was the political expression.[3]

The C. S. P. leaders were well aware of what they considered to be defects in the Congress organisation, but they were confident of their ability to transform it into 'a great revolutionary force'.[4] Their strategy was first to get all socialists into the

3. Acharya Narendra Deva, *op. cit.*, p. 4.
4. *Ibid.*

Congress, and secondly to mould the Congress along socialist lines.

The C. S. P. leaders, from the very beginning, maintained that this strategy was perfectly consistent with Marxian dialectics. They declared that the dialectical method was 'a living method of great elasticity and one who follows it, has to adapt himself to the changing situation'.[5] They insisted that though a socialist should never forget his ultimate goal, i. e. the creation of a classless and casteless society in India, yet if the actual situation was not ripe for such an event, he should not for that reason try to frustrate the cause of freedom by refusing to fight the alien power in collaboration with other classes. Indeed, such an approach was quite consistent with socialist principles 'because for a subject nation, political independence is an inevitable stage on the way to socialism'[6].

The attitude of the Communists to the Congress was very different. It was in fact ever changing, alternating between support and opposition, according to the zig-zags of the Comintern. The Indian Communists tried to be consistent in their condemnation of Congress leadership as bourgeois in composition, thought and ideas, and they constantly tried to undermine both its organisation and leadership. But at all times they were at the receiving end of orders from the Comintern. As the Indian Communist Party was closely allied with the Comintern, and was forced to accept its dictates as valid for India, we should examine the various theses it put forward from time to time on colonial questions.

From an early stage in its existence the Communist International or Comintern or Third International had interested itself

5. *Ibid.*
6. *Ibid.*, p. 5.

in colonial and semi-colonial countries. This interest was partly ideologically inspired and partly necessitated by the pursuit of the Russian national interest. The Bolshevik Revolution of 1917 created in the leaders of the Soviet Union a missionary zeal to spread communist revolution to all parts of the world and, at least in its pre-Stalin days, the Soviet Union did achieve some influence in colonial countries. But much more important was the isolated position of Russia itself, particularly after the intervention of the West in an effort to undo the Revolution. This led the Bolsheviks to search for allies wherever they could be found, and to endeavour to weaken the imperialist and capitalist countries wherever they could find their weak spots. As a consequence, there arose the policy of trying to win the support of all working class movements and of impelling them towards revolution, together with the allied policy of striking at the imperialist powers through their back-doors, i. e. their colonies. These were in fact the twin objectives of the Comintern.

As it was a fundamental Marxist contention that the prosperity and power of the imperialist countries of the West was derived largely from the exploitation of their colonies, the Russians held that once these colonies were liberated, the bourgeois superstructure of these countries would also collapse.[7] Thus crises would be precipitated which would in turn lead to proletarian revolution. And thus the Soviet Union would be saved from attack by 'predatory' imperialist powers. As emphasised by Lenin, there was an essential connection between defence of the Soviet Union as the Soviet fatherland and the stirring up of revolution amongst all the oppressed peoples of the world.[8]

7. V. I. Lenin, *op. cit.*, p. 215.
8. Theses on the National and Colonial question adopted by the Second Comintern Congress; Jane Degras, *The Communist International* 1919-1943 *Documents*, London, 1956, p. 141.

The liberation of all colonies was accordingly one of the major objectives of the Communist International, which in the 1920s proceeded to despatch its agents to the four quarters of the globe. It established a Far Eastern Bureau in Shanghai with the purpose of spreading and promoting communist movements and ideas in all the countries of the then colonial East. By the late 1920s some progress had been made, particularly in the trade union field. Moreover, during this period, the Communist International, on the whole, pursued a policy of co-operation with the bourgeois led nationalist movements. The sympathetic understanding which Lenin had shown towards the Asian nationalist movements had very much impressed even the non-socialist Asian intellectuals. Consequently, there was an early phase when the Communists were able to work amicably with the Asian nationalists for the achievement of national independence.

This co-operative phase ended, however, with Stalin's domination of the Communist International. It is generally believed that changes were necessitated by the reverses which the Chinese Communists sustained in 1927 at the hands of Chiang Kai-Shek. But a speech by Stalin in 1925 to the students of the University of the Toilers of the East throws some light on the new Russian attitude to colonial revolutions. Stalin analysed the Indian situation as follows :

> The fundamental and new feature in the conditions of existence of such colonies as India is not only that the national bourgeoisie has split into a revolutionary party and a compromising party, but, primarily, that the compromising section of this bourgeoisie has already managed, in the main, to come to an agreement with imperialism..... this section of the bourgeoisie, the wealthiest and the most influential section, is completely going over to the camp of the irreconcilable enemies of the revolution, having entered into

> a block . . . .against the peasants and workers of its own country.[9]

Stalin accordingly maintained that in the new situation the task of the proletarian movement headed by the Communists was to 'isolate the compromising bourgeoisie' and for the Communists to maintain their 'hegemony', though they might for certain purposes enter into alliances with the 'revolutionary bourgeoisie'. Thus, there was launched that suicidal policy by the Communists International which led, at least in India, not to the desired isolation of the 'compromising bourgeoisie' but to the isolation of the Communists themselves'.

The consequences for India of the new Soviet 'line' were now seen in the attacks directed by the Indian Communists against the Congress, presumably on the grounds that it was led by a 'compromising bourgeoisie'. A document entitled—'Platform of Action of the Communist Party of India' appearing in *Pravda* in 1930 at the time of the great Congress led Civil Disobedience Movement, made the following assertion :

> .....the greatest threat to the victory of the Indian revolution is the fact that the great mass of our people still harbour illusions about the National Congress, and have not realised that it represents a class organisation of the capitalists working against the fundamental interests of the toiling masses of our country.[10]

Nor did the left wing of Congress, which one might have imagined would have won Soviet approval as a 'revolutionary bourgeoisie', escape attack. Left wing leaders like Nehru,

9. V. I. Lenin, J. V. Stalin, E. Zhukov, *On the Colonial Question*, Bombay, 1948, p. 12.
10. Cited by M. R. Masani, *The Communist Party of India*, London, 1954, pp. 42-43.

Bose and others were condemned as a 'most harmful' and 'dangerous obstacle' to the victory of the Indian revolution because the agitation they were fostering was confining the struggle of the masses within the framework of a British imperialist constitution. The primary task of the Indian Communist Party was therefore the exposure of the 'Left' Congress leaders and the new party (the C. S. P.) they were thought likely to be about to bring into existence. Ruthless war should be waged against the left wing leaders so that they might be isolated from the Indian peasants and workers, the latter being organised for anti-imperialist revolution under the banner of the Communist Party.[11]

It is therefore not surprising that the Indian Communists kept themselves aloof from the Civil Disobedience Movements of 1930 and 1932, and condemned the Congress Socialist leaders as 'social fascists'. The net result, of course, was the Communists' own isolation from the main currents of Indian politics, and their failure was regarded in some quarters as the failure of the Indian left wing as a whole. This was one of the main concerns of the Socialists when they founded the Congress Socialist Party; they wanted to fill the gap left by the Communists. As Masani has commented :

> In the failure of the Communist Party was seen the failure of the Left... during those days. Leftism was not very consciously separated from communism, and the two were very badly mixed up in the minds of many people. It was in order to fill the gap left by the failure of the Communist Party that the Congress Socialist Party was brought into being.[12]

The formation of the C. S. P. was inevitably criticised by

11. *Ibid.*, p. 43.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 53.

the Comintern controlled Indian Communist leaders. But this did not deter the Socialists from trying to bring about a reconciliation between what they regarded as the two wings of the same Marxist movement with the aim of achieving a united left wing. The C. S. P. therefore refrained from counter-attacking against the Communists. But at the first Conference of the C. S. P. at Bombay in 1934, in view of their continued hostile attitude, the Socialists decided not to admit the Communists to party membership. They limited themselves to expressing the hope of an eventual union of all the leftist forces in the country in a single organisation. But though some temporary unity was achieved in the trade union field, the Socialists' overtures met with a poor response.

The Communist Party was now pursuing the changed policy line laid down by the Communist International, the aim of which was to achieve clear cut identity for all communist parties in colonial and semi-colonial countries.[13] In conformity with this Soviet line, the Communists continued to attack all other rival political organisations, especially those professing a belief in socialism and the teachings of Marx.

There was however yet another change of line after the meeting of the Seventh Congress of the Communist International in 1935. At this Congress the leaders of the International were forced to recognise that their change of policy had misfired; they viewed with 'great concern' the isolation of all the communist parties in the colonial and semi-colonial countries. Both Dimitrov in his general report and Wang Ming in his sectional report criticised the Indian Communist Party for what was

13. *Revolutionary Movement in the Colonies and semi-Colonies* (Being the Theses on the colonial problem of the 6th Congress of the Comintern), Bombay, 1948, p. 35.

described as 'Left sectarianism' and for non-participation in the Civil Disobedience Movements organised by the Indian National Congress. The Communist International now reverted to its earlier line and urged the Indian Communists to take an active part in the mass-anti-imperialist movement headed by the 'national reformists' i. e. the Congress. It was laid down that one of the main tasks of the Indian Communists must be to strive for unity among, and joint action with, all the various groups and sections of the anti-imperialist and revolutionary forces. Yet at the same time, the Communist International insisted that the Communists must maintain their complete organisational and political independence.

In response to their new orders from Moscow, the Indian Communists now set out to woo the Socialists. Evidence of the change of line was soon forthcoming in an article by R. Palme Dutt and Ben Bradley[14] in the **Labour Monthly** of March 1936 in which the Indian situation and the role of the Congress in the nationalist movement were analysed in a way contrived to win the approval of the Congress Socialists.[15] In the same article the demand for an Indian Constituent Assembly, elected by the people with full sovereign rights, was recognised as an essential slogan to rally for united action all those opposed to imperialism.[16] It was argued that there could be no socialism without national liberation, and that there was no contradiction

14. B. F. Bradley was sent by the British Communist Party in the 1920s to organise the Communist Party in India. R. Palme Dutt, resident in U. K. and vice-president of the Communist Party of Great Britain, was reputed to be the chief mentor of the Indian Communists.
15. 'The Anti-Imperialist Front in India' *The Labour Monthly*, London, March, 1936, pp. 149-60.
16. *Ibid.*, pp. 159-60.

between the demand for Soviets and the demand for a Constituent Assembly. Thus the stage was set for a rapprochement between the Communists and the Socialists.

In response to the 'United Front' line of the Communist International the C. P. I. was quick to change its attitude, both to the C. S. P. and to the Congress. And the Socialists were not slow to respond since they saw this as a golden opportunity for achieving a united Marxist party. They therefore agreed to admit Communists to the C. S. P., though admissions, in every instance, were to be subject to the approval of the National Executive.[17] In point of fact, however, such approval was rarely sought by the lower units of the Party. And it seems this stipulation was imposed merely as a means of pacifying those members of the C. S. P. who were opposed to a united front with the Communists. That the admission of the Communists met with the complete approval of the C. S. P. leaders is suggested by the fact that some were actually taken into the National Executive.

But as more and more Communists came into the Party, disturbing reports of their disruptive activities began to pour into the Central Office. The most serious complaints came from Andhra and the industrial areas in and around Calcutta, Bombay and Kanpur. In 1937 the Patna meeting of the National Executive of the C. S. P. discussed a secret document of the Communist Party which claimed that the C. P. I. was the only real socialist party in India and that it did not intend to tolerate any other rival or rivals. The document in question asserted that 'the Congress Socialist Party was to be developed merely into a platform of Left Unity'. In some alarm, the National Execu-

17. The decision was made at the Meerut Conference of the Congress Socialist Party in January, 1936.

tive decided to ban any further entry of Communist into the Party, but there is no proof that this decision was even partially implemented by the lower units. On the contrary, it was during this period that the Trojan horse tactics of the C. P. I. led to the Communists gaining complete control of the Andhra, Tamilnad and Kerala units of the C. S. P. And largely owing to the indecision and lack of firmness of the Socialist leaders this regrettable trend was allowed to continue.[18]

It was not until the Lahore Conference of the Party in 1938 that the growing differences between the Socialists and those Communists who had joined the Party to disrupt it or capture it were brought out into the open. Just before the Conference M. R. Masani had published a document entitled—'Communist Plot against the C. S. P', which described in detail the plan of action the Communists were following in order to capture the C. S. P.[19] The evidence which Masani produced was conclusive and related mainly to the circular instructions which had been issued to Communist members in all the provinces. As Jayaprakash Narayan has admitted, this discovery was no surprise to most of the Socialist leaders, but to many of the rank and file the incriminating circular came as a great shock.[20] Yet the National Executive still showed reluctance to take a firm stand, allowing matters to drift as before. Narayan confessed that 'it was no longer the idea or hope for unity' which impelled the Executive to adopt this hesitant attitude, but its reluctance 'to face the unpleasant task' of breaking with the Communists.

The Lahore Conference of 1938 was in many ways a

18. Jayaprakash Narayan, 'Problems of Socialist Unity In India' in, *Towards Struggle*, Bombay, 1946, p. 173.
19. M. R. Masani, *op. cit.*, pp. 69-70.
20. Jayaprakash Narayan, *op. cit.*, p. 176.

landmark in the relations between the C. P. I. and the C. S. P. At the meeting the Communist members of the C. S. P. presented a thesis of their own and a list of members to be elected by the Conference to the National Executive.[21] The main argument of the Communist thesis was that the C. S. P. should be made a platform for 'leftist unity'.

To this direct challenge the Socialists replied with a counter-thesis.[22] They accused the Communists of having joined the C. S. P. with the deliberate intention of disrupting it from within. And they stated categorically that the C. S. P. must develop as a homogeneous Party with a distinct programme and policy of its own and not merely as a loose organisation of all 'leftist elements'. Whilst subscribing to the principle of left wing unity, the Communists were simply using the C. S. P. as a recruiting ground for membership of their own party, the separate identity of which they clearly intended to preserve.

Both manoeuvres of the Communists at the Lahore Conference were defeated. The Socialists' counter-thesis made it evident that the C. S. P. leaders were well aware of the nature of the Communists' intrigues. And the Communists' list for the new National Executive was rejected. The main feature of their list had been the offer of the General Secretaryship to Narayan, but with their own supporters in a majority on the Executive. It was Narayan's list that was finally accepted, and this gave the Communists only one third of the seats on the Executive.

21. See *Draft Thesis of the Congress Socialist Party Prepared by S. Zaheer, D. Mehta and S. S. Batliwala on Behalf of the Communist Members of the Congress Socialist Party*, Lahore, 1938.
22. The Socialists' counter thesis was drafted by Acharya Narendra Deva, A. Patwardhan, Asoka Mehta and Kamala Devi Chattopadhyay.

Nevertheless, this really amounted to a policy of appeasement towards the Communists and led to much criticism of the C. S. P. leader most responsible, Narayan. Lohia, Patwardhan, Asoka Mehta and Masani felt so strongly about the concessions that were being made to the Communists as to resign from the National Executive. These 'loyal' members of the C. S. P. felt that the Party was being delivered day by day into the hands of the Communists and that some dramatic gesture was necessary in order to bring home the significance of what was happening to the rank and file. In this they partly succeeded as the resignations undoubtedly created widespread consternation.

Soon afterwards, the problem of Communist membership of the Party was raised again at a meeting of the National Executive in Bombay. All the Socialist members were agreed that the Communists should be asked to leave the C. S. P. After a lengthy and inconclusive discussion, provoked by the opposition of the Communist members, it was agreed to leave the decision to the General Secretary, Jayaprakash Narayan. And as he did not relish the prospect of 'precipitating a grave crisis in the socialist movement' he decided in favour of what amounted to a compromise.[23] No more Communists were to be admitted to the C. S. P. and the Party units were to be kept under the strict control of 'genuine' members, but those Communists who had already joined the Party were not to be expelled.

This half-hearted decision was never implemented until the beginning of the Second World War, and as Narayan admitted, it would not have been implemented even then but for the activities of the Communists themselves. At the beginning of the War the C. P. I. gave up the pretence of the

23. Jayaprakash Narayan, *op. cit.*, p. 176.

United Front and once again declared war on the C. S. P. The Communists now set out to flatter the Congress High Command which was at that time being criticised by the Socialists for its reluctance to start an active campaign against the Government of India's war effort. In ridiculing the Anti-Compromise Committee organised by S. C. Bose, the General Secretary of the C. P. I., P. C. Joshi declared :

> . . . .the struggle to be initiated by the proposed Committee will be neither national nor struggle. Nor would it be possible to lead the Congress on the path of active struggle by these methods. It will disunite the Congress and thus will weaken the only organisation capable of conducting a truly national struggle.[24]

The Communists' sudden regard for the Congress was further exemplified at this time by the way they welcomed the new amendments in the Congress 'Independence Pledge' simply because these had been criticised by the Socialists.

The gulf between the Communists and the Socialists thus became wider and wider. In Europe itself the 'United Front' slogan was losing much of its charm under the impact of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, the repercussions of which were already being felt in India. In response to the new situation, the Indian Communists, as the Socialists by now had come to realise, were determined to represent themselves to the Indian people as the only champions of Socialism and of the working class movement. They intended to claim the sole leadership in the 'coming struggle' for power.

It was the belated recognition of the true nature of the Communists' ambitions that led the National Executive of the C. S. P.

24. B. Asche, 'Nehru and the Question of Civil Disobedience in India', *World News and Views*, London, June 8, 1940.

to take action at last over the question of the Communist members within the Party. At Ramgarh in 1940 the Executive decided to expel all Communists from the C. S. P.

The United Front and the Trade Unions

During the Untied Front period the Socialists and the Communists naturally endeavoured to work together in the trade union field, but their relationships were marred by as much uneasiness and tension as in the purely political field.

The Trade Union Movement in India had been first organised in 1919 by the All India Trade Union Congress under the inspiration of liberal leaders like N. M. Joshi. Bal Gangadhar Tilak had been an early supporter. But it was only in the 1920s that Trade Unionism made any real headway by which time, particularly in the late 1920s, the Communists had begun to become prominent in the movement. They lost no time in creating dissension, and in 1929 at Nagpur they succeeded in splitting the movement over the question of the International Affiliation of the All India Trade Union Congress.

In 1931 another split occurred at the Calcutta Conference of the T. U. C. On this occasion the Communists found themselves in a minority, so they left the organisation to form one of their own which became known as the Red Trade Union Congress. The first move towards united action in the trade union field came when the Communists joined forces with the Royist influenced unions and gave the signal for a country-wide strike of all textile workers. When the Congress Socialist Party was formed in 1934, further attempts were made to bring about a unified trade union movement and in that year an agreement was concluded between the C. S. P. and the Communists for limited co-operation in this field.

This agreement was made for strictly political reasons rather

than in the interests of trade unionism. The newly born C. S. P. wanted to neutralise opposition to it from the existing left wing groups (the Communists and the Royists) and the Communists, as a proscribed Party, were in need of allies so that they could emerge from their isolation and thus adopt an open platform. The 1934 agreement on trade union activity was therefore in the political interests of all the participants.

The main conditions of the agreement between the C. S. P. and the Communists were as follows :

> There shall be joint action by the All India Congress Socialist Party, the All India Trade Union Congress, the National Trade Union Federation and the Red Trade Union Congress on specific issues, such as the danger of another war, Government repression, the Joint Parliamentary Committee Report and other issues which may arise from time to time.

But there was to be joint action only if the following conditions were fulfilled by the parties to the agreement :

(1) There shall be no mutual criticism in speeches or by distribution of leaflets by parties at joint functions.

(2) There shall be no abuse of each other, nor imputation of motives or honesty of either party.

(3) Before every joint action there shall be joint agreement regarding the terms of resolutions and slogans, carrying of banners and flags, and distribution of leaflets and literature.

(4) There shall be no advocacy of violence by either party at joint functions.

(5) At joint functions there shall be no appeal for support to either party or to enrol members or to draw any exclusive advantage to either party.

In the case of co-operation between the C. S. P. and the Red Trade Union Congress the following additional condition was to be observed :

> . Each party to the United Front Agreement (i. e., the C. S. P. and the Red T. U. C.) reserves the right of honest criticism of the political principles and policies of the other from its independent platform.[25]

From the beginning, there were difficulties over implementing this agreement. The strained relations between the Socialists and the Communists over political strategy inevitably had repercussions on the trade union front. But they were less severe because, as the political leaders became increasingly absorbed in purely political problems during the late 1930s, less and less attention was paid to trade unionism. As a consequence, the uneasy alliance between the Communists and the Socialists on the trade union front actually survived longer than the 'United Front' in the political field. When the rift did come it was as a result of the alliance between the Soviet Union and the Allied powers and the consequent change in the political line of the Comintern. It now became the policy of the C. P. I. to support the British war effort in India, the Communists switching their strategy 'from more strikes to more production'. They now declared it to be :

> .....the patriotic duty of every worker to strengthen defence by taking the initiative for organising more production and better transport and against stoppage of work irrespective of what the boss or bureaucrat does—Communists should take a bold and open stand against strikes, as they injure the defence of the country by holding up production.[26]

Such a *volte-face* was unlikely to be favourably received by the Socialists.

25. Cited by M. R. Masani, *op. cit.*, pp. 54-55.
26. *Ibid.*, p. 279.

Attitudes of the C. S. P. and the C. P. I. to the Second World War

The beginning of the Second World War did not pose any serious dilemma for the C. S. P. Indeed, it seemed to offer an admirable opportunity for furthering the achievement of socialism and independence in India because of the crisis it created for the colonial power. The C. S. P. therefore adhered to its original policy statement on war made in 1934.[27] Nor did the War at first present any serious problem for the C. P. I. as it undoubtedly did for the Communist Parties of Great Britain and France. At the outset, the Indian Communists adopted the same attitude as the Socialists. In a manifesto on the war issue they declared that its outbreak heralded a new era of revolutions, that the masses were raising the red banner everywhere, and that the United Kingdom was no longer master of the situation. The necessary conditions for a revolutionary upsurge were present, and any failure to take advantage of such an opportunity for the liberation of the country would be a crime against the national movement and against humanity. Any hesitation would be a crime that 'history would not forgive.'[28]

Throughout the first phase of the War, i. e. up to the attack by Germany on the Soviet Union in July, 1941, both the C. S. P. and the C. P. I. were therefore broadly in agreement in their analysis of the situation and the tactics to be adopted. Both parties pursued policies of militant opposition to British rule in India. But Hitler's attack on the Soviet Union changed the whole character of the War for Communists everywhere. It was no longer an imperialist struggle but a people's war against fascism which was threatening the Soviet fatherland. All

27. *Programme and Policy of the Congress Socialist Party*, Bombay, 1934.
28. *World News and Views*, London, March 6, 1940.

over the world, therefore, Communists began to abandon opposition to the War in favour of active co-operation with the Allied powers.

At first, the C. P. I. did not recognise any fundamental change in the nature of the War brought about by the German attack on the Soviet Union. In a statement entitled 'The Soviet German War', the Politbureaue of the C. P. I. argued that the War continued to be imperialistic and that there was therefore no reason to change the existing policy of resistance to it :

> The C. P. I. declares that the only way in which the Indian people can help in the just war in which the Soviet people are engaged is by intensifying it all the more vigorously for their own emancipation from the British imperialist yoke. Our attitude towards the British Government and its imperialist war aims remains what it was. We must continue, nay, intensify our struggle against both. There can be no change in our policy until a people's government, which unequivocally renounces imperialist aims in this war as well as in India and the colonies, comes to power. We can render really effective aid to the Soviet Union only as a free people.[29]

But the first flood of German victories and their world wide repercussions soon began to make the Indian Communists think again. It began to dawn on some of them that the defeat of the Soviet Union was not out of the question, and that such a catastrophe would strengthen rather than weaken imperialism. Those who thought along these lines began to argue that the utmost support should be given to the Allied powers with whom the Soviet Union was now in alliance.

29. Cited by Acharya Narendra Deva, *Socialism and National Revolution*, p. 152.

The Central Committee of the C. P. I. at first rejected these arguments, condemning all those who supported them as 'false internationalists and deceivers of the people'.[30] The decisive influence in leading the Central Committee to change its mind seems to have been the complete switch in the policy of the Communist Party of Great Britain. The C. P. G. B. declared that :

> The victory of the alliance of the peoples in association with the Soviet Union means not only the liberation of the nations enslaved by Fascism, but also the most favourable conditions for the final liberation of the Indian people and all nations under foreign domination....today, the path to Indian independence lies through the victory of the Soviet Union and its allies.[31]

The C. P. I. accordingly decided to co-operate with the British war effort in India. From November 1941 until the end of theWar the Politbureau of the C. P. I. accepted the slogan of 'People's War'. The change in strategy was justified in a pamphlet called 'Forward to Freedom' written by P. C. Joshi, which appeared early in 1942. It emphasised that the new aim was 'co-operation first' as the necessary prelude to the pressing of national demands on the British Government. In acknowledgement of the Communist's change of heart, a grateful Government of India legalised the C. P. I. in 1941.

The Communist's agreement to co-operate with the Government of India struck the final blow at any idea of Socialist-Communist unity, or even of a united front or joint action on specific issues. The logic of 'co-operation first' was unlikely to appeal to the C. S. P. since all the efforts of the Indian National

30. *Ibid.*, p. 153.
31. *World News and Views*, London, October 18, 1941.

Congress to achieve a reasonable compromise with the British had already proved futile. Moreover, the C. S. P. theoreticians did not feel there was any convincing reason why they should change their analysis of the war as a result of the German attack on the Soviet Union. They reminded themselves of the way in which Lenin during the First World War had been able to profit from the chaos caused by war in order to establish socialism in Russia. Mr. Churchill's exclusion of India from the application of the Atlantic Charter further fortified the socialists in their belief that the War was being fought to strengthen the hands of the imperialist powers.

The C. S. P. was sceptical as to how Russia could help India at this time. Here they pointed to Article 5 of the Anglo-Soviet Treaty, which declared that no party to the treaty would interfere in the internal affairs of the other. As it was well known that the British Government always held that colonial issues lay within the field of domestic jurisdiction, so the Socialists in an essentially realistic appraisal of the situation, were sceptical as to exactly how the Russians could help them to liberate India.

With regard to the British, the Socialists took their stand on the 'Quit India' resolution. They felt that the British would never voluntarily abdicate their power as a reward for Indian co-operation in the War. All the avenues for further negotiation seemed blocked. The 'August Offer' of the British had fallen far short of Indian demands. Nor was the Cripps Mission any more successful, disappointing almost every section of Indian opinion.

Many Congressmen, and almost all Socialists, therefore were convinced that militant opposition to the British war effort in India was the only conceivable policy they could support. Acharya Narendra Deva thus put the Socialist point of view :

It is the duty of the revolutionary socialists and communists to expose the imperialist character of the war to the people, to awaken their revolutionary spirit. The communists have betrayed socialism and have distorted Marxism and dialectics to justify their unconditional support of this war. It is our revolutionary duty to expose these social chauvinists who are exploiting the proletariat's sympathy for the Soviet Union by enlisting their support in this imperialist war for the bourgeois governments of the allied nations, which are struggling to safeguard their capitalist class interests.[32]

The Communists' decision to co-operate with the British during 1942-45 undoubtedly isolated them from the national movement and enabled all non-Communists to condemn them as lacking in patriotism. They were even accused by the Nationalists and Socialists of engaging in espionage for the Government of India during the 1942 August Movement, a charge also brought by S. S. Batliwala after his resignation from the C. P. I. He alleged that P. C. Joshi :

.....had detailed certain Party members, without the knowledge of the Central Committee or the ranka nd file of the Party, to be in touch with the Army Intelligence Department, and had supplied the C. I. D. chiefs with such information as they would require against nationalist workers who were connected with the 1942 struggle, or against persons who had come to India on behalf of the Azad Hind Government of Netaji Bose.[33]

S. S. Batliwala alleged there was a confidential file of correspondence between P. C. Joshi, the Secretary of the C. P. I. and

32. Acharya Narendra Deva, *op. cit.*, p. 154.
33. Press Conference, Bombay, February 22, 1946, Cited by M. R. Masani, *op.cit.*, pp. 82-84.

Sir Reginald Maxwell, Home Member of the Government of India, and he was positive that the publication of this correspondence would prove conclusively that P. C. Joshi had placed the services of C. P. I. members at the disposal of the Home Department for purposes of espionage against Indian nationalists.

The C. P. I. repudiated the charges brought against it by the nationalists, socialists and its own dissident members in a typical resolution adopted at the First Conference of the Party on May 23 1943, the gist of which was that it was its opponents who were the real traitors :

> .....the groups which make up the fifth column are the Forward Block, the Party of the traitor Bose, the Congress Socialist Party which betrayed socialism at the beginning of the war and pursued a policy of opportunism and disruption and ended in the camp of the Trotskyite traitors, and finally, the Trotskyite groups which are criminal gangs in the pay of fascists. The Communist Party declares that all these three groups must be treated by every honest Indian as the worst enemy of the nation and driven out of political life and exterminated.[34]

Attitudes of the C. S. P. and C. P. I. to the Demand for Pakistan

Finally, we come to the other great political issue which divided the Socialists and the Communists during these years. They were in fundamental disagreement over the recognition of the Muslim League's claim for a separate 'Homeland' for the Indian Muslims. The Socialists all along maintained that both Hindus and Muslims had a common heritage which was the outcome of the fusion of Dravidian, Aryan and Islamic

34. Cited by Madhu Limaye, *Communist Party : Fact and Fiction*, Hyderabad, 1951, pp. 48-49.

civilisations. They therefore repudiated the 'Two Nation Theory' which was being put forward at this time by the Muslim League. The Socialists held that religion alone could not be accepted as the sole basis for the creation of a new state. What is more, they argued that the formation of two states would not solve the Hindu-Muslim problem. Without large scale movement of population, which they considered impracticable, the creation of Pakistan would solve nothing.

From the very beginning, the Socialists had been of the opinion that the root of communal conflict lay in the economic backwardness of the Muslim masses, and that economic issues cut across both Muslim and Hindu communities. They believed that there *was* an identity of economic interests and that this could form a basis for lasting unity between the two communities. It was through common struggle for their common interests that real unity would be achieved. Underlying all these arguments was the desire of the Congress Socialists to preserve the political unity of the Indian sub-continent and to build free India on the basis of a secular society.

The Communists, on the other hand, were under the influence of the Soviet theory of nationalities. The C. P. I. was of the opinion that the different linguistic groups in India did constitute distinct nationalities, and that their claims to autonomy should be recognised, along with the right to secede :

> To look upon the right of secession as the special fad of Mr. Jinnah, as the conspiracy of a few communalists to divide India in the interests of British imperialism, is to ignore the Muslim awakening, as also of the other nationalities, e. g. Karnatakis, Maharastrians, etc.[35]

35. *The People's War*, Bombay, August 9, 1942.
See also G. M. Adhikari, 'Pakistan and National Unity',

But in the eyes of Nationalists and Socialists it was both antinational and unpatriotic to recognise the Muslim league's claim for the recognition of the 'Two Nation Theory.'

Labour Monthly, London, March 1943, pp. 87-91. See also in the same journal, Policy statement of the Communist Party of India with regard to the Muslim League's demand for Pakistan—'On Pakistan and National Unity', p. 93.

CHAPTER 4 THE CONGRESS SOCIALIST PARTY AND THE INDIAN NATIONAL CONGRESS, 1942-48

In August 1942 the immediate task facing all Congressmen who had not been imprisoned was how to continue the struggle inaugurated by the arrest of the members of the All India Congress Committee and of Mahatma Gandhi. There was every sign of a widespread popular response to the movement which had now been decisively launched. Nevertheless, there was an imperative need for some directing organisation to guide the struggle. For this purpose, a Central Directorate was set up in Bombay, a body in whose activities the few Socialists who had escaped detention took a prominent part. Conspicuous amongst these were Dr. Ram Manohar Lohia and Achyut Patwardhan.

From the outset, there was some debate as to whether the activities of the Central Directorate should be carried on in the name of the Congress or not. Jayaprakash Narayan, who managed to escape from internment on November 9, 1942, was at first opposed to the idea of the Central Directorate functioning in the name of the Congress. During his short internment he seems to have decided, largely in the absence of adequate information about the progress of the movement, that it would be best if the Central Directorate worked in the name of the C. S. P. After his escape he made contact with other members of the Party who were still at liberty and put this proposal to them. They, however, were in favour of continuing to fight under the banner of the Congress, on the grounds that Narayan's proposal would create divisions within Congress at a time

when unity was essential. And Narayan himself seems to have been very ready to drop the idea when he discovered, after his arrival in Bombay, how much backing the Central Directorate was getting from all Congressmen still at liberty.

Nevertheless, within a short space of time the Central Directorate both abandoned and reassumed the prefix 'Congress'. First of all, Mahatma Gandhi's fast, provoked by the growing acts of violence which were being committed, disturbed many of his followers to such an extent as to lead them to complain that it would be grossly improper for the Central Directorate to continue to function in the name of Congress. The prefix was therefore dropped. But only to be reassumed at the demand of another group of Congressmen who vigorously protested at the change in nomenclature.

There were other difficulties. When Mahatma Gandhi protested that sabotage was not in accordance with the principle of non-violence, the Socialists, at the instance of Narayan, decided they would have to separate sabotage operations and preparations for armed struggle from Congress activities. Sabotage was accordingly directed by a guerilla organisation known as the AZAD DASTA which had branches all over the country and which played an important part in organising wrecking and disorder.[1] All other activities were carried on by the Central Directorate in the name of the Congress..

Soon, however, a heated controversy arose amongst the members of the Central Directorate itself over the ethics of the use of violence. Those who disapproved of violence formed a separate committee called the Satyagraha Samiti under the leadership of Sucheta Kripalani and Anand Prasad Chaudhari. The

1. Govind Sahai, '42 *Rebellion*,' 1947, pp. 450-55.

other members, who had no scruples about the use of violence were all Socialists.

But by this time violent agitation was coming to a standstill. The arrests of Narayan and Lohia deprived the AZAD DASTA of dynamic leadership, and although some sporadic acts of violence continued, especially in Bihar, the movement for all practical purposes had come to an end. The rest of the story is soon told. In 1944, after his release, Mahatma Gandhi asked all Congressmen who had absconded to surrender to the authorities. The members of the Satyagraha Samiti and its supporters followed their master's advice, but the Central Directorate and its following refused to do so. They declared they would comply only if actually ordered to by the Mahatma. The latter however was unwilling to go to such lengths, as he was of the opinion that his imprisonment had deprived him of the right to give orders, and that his generalship of the August '42 Movement had already lapsed. He therefore compromised by saying that, in the circumstances, only those Congressmen should surrender to the authorities who believed that 'underground' activities were wrong. The Socialists took the Mahatma at his word and did not surrender.

The prominent part played by the Socialists in the August Movement of 1942 is of fundamental importance to an understanding of the political thinking of the Indian Socialists. By so eagerly espousing violence, they not only signified their hostility to the stand of the A. I. C. C., but also expressed their deep-seated antagonism to Gandhism which they considered was having a wholly prejudicial influence on the whole development of the nationalist movement.

The Socialists, and Narayan in particular, saw in the August Movement the beginnings of a much greater struggle. It was Narayan's whole aim, after his escape from Hazaribagh Central

Prison, to try to organise a great insurrectionary struggle in co-operation with all like-minded people both inside and outside the Congress. His two letters addressed 'To All Fighters of Freedom' clearly indicated the direction which he desired the movement to take. Though it was already slowing down at the time of his escape from gaol, this did not in any way deter him from the pursuit of his one major objective. It was to that end that he had organised the AZAD DASTA for sabotage. He felt that the recession in the movement was only a temporary phase, and he wanted the people to consolidate their position for the 'next offensive' which was to be a fight to the finish.[2]

Narayan at this time saw the violent August Movement as leading on to the complete overthrow of imperialism and he was therefore critical of all compromising alliances. He was hostile, not only to any talk of an understanding between the Congress and the Government of India, but also to any agreement between the Congress and the Muslim League. The supreme task of the hour was to achieve the 'unity of all national revolutionary forces' and to this unity the Muslim League could make no contribution :

> .....unity between the League and the Congress does not foreshadow the growth of these forces but their absolute negation, for the League cannot conceivably tread the path of revolution.[3]

With regard to the resort to violence, about which there had been so much heart-searching, Narayan held that it was both essential for the achievement of national independence and that Congress was in fact committed to it as a weapon of

2. Jayaprakash Narayan, *To All Fighters For Freedom*, Letter No. 1, Lucknow, 1946, p. 6.
3. *Ibid.* p. 5.

struggle. The Congress itself had declared in favour of fighting 'aggression violently if the country became independent'.[4] On this basis he argued—and not without some casuistry :

> We have declared ourselves independent, and also named Britain as an aggressive power; we are therefore justified, within the terms of the Bombay resolution itself, to fight Britain with arms.[5]

Narayan held that the Congress Working Committee and the A. I. C. C. had themselves differed with the Mahatma over the resort to violence and had actually rejected his arguments in favour of non-violence. He therefore considered himself completely justified as 'an honest Congressman' in repelling 'British aggression with arms'.[6]

But most of the members of the A. I. C. C. remained unconvinced by the Socialists' defence of violence as the key to national liberation.

Was the August Movement a Congress Struggle ?

As the Congress did not either own or disown the 1942 movement it is relevant to ask whether it was a Congress Struggle at all. In point of fact, this controversy was raised soon after the movement had subsided. Many doubts were expressed as to whether the acts of violence which occurred during the agitation could ever have been contemplated by the members of the A. I. C. C. Seeing that the latter were all arrested before they could decide on a concrete plan of action, there were many Congressmen who thought the A. I. C. C. was absolved from all responsibility.

In the absence of any plan of action, it would be anyone's

4. *Ibid.*, p. 9.
5. *Ibid.*,
6. *Ibid.*, p. 10.

guess as to what the members of the A. I. C. C. and the Working Committee had in mind with regard to the actual implementation of the 'Quit India' resolution. Certainly, in the case of the Mahatma, his published correspondence with the Viceroy indicates that he himself was strongly opposed to the use of violence during the August movement. But many observers have felt that those who resorted to violence at this time did so because the movement seemed to the masses to be conducted in the names of Congress and the Mahatma. There were no doubt differences of opinion at the top level amongst those Congress leaders who had managed to keep out of prison, but there can be no doubt that the people at large responded to sabotage as a weapon of struggle in the belief that it was sanctioned by the Congress and the Mahatma. There was such widespread support for violence throughout the country that few Congressmen felt they could rightly keep aloof.

It might therefore be argued with some plausibility that the 1942 Movement was in reality inspired by the Congress. But despite the fact that individual leaders like Nehru declared their full support for what happened during this phase, it is interesting to note that the Congress as an organisation has never officially accepted responsibility for the August Movement. Indeed, it is difficult to see how it could have done so when we consider how much the A. I. C. C. was under the domination of the Mahatma's philosophy of non-violence.

Nevertheless, Narayan, in this controversy continued to argue that the use of violence was inevitable and that it had been sanctioned by the Congress leadership :

> What is it that those who deny the authority of the Congress for the struggle would desire to have happened on the 9th August, after the cowardly attack on our leaders ? What

do they think was the desire of the W. C. and Mahatma Gandhi in the event of arrest ? Would the detractors of the present struggle have been happy if there had been no reaction to the arrest of the leaders, if the country had calmly bowed its head before imperialist jack-boot ?

Or was it expected that only protest meetings should have been held demanding the release of arrested leaders (as was advocated by certain erstwhile Revolutionaries) and when they were not released, further meetings should have been held, till the audiences became too disgusted to attend, after which the 'protestants' could have gone to sleep with a clear conscience ?[7]

The Reorganisation of the C. S. P.

Following on the release from prison of the C. S. P. leaders and most of the members in 1945-46, there naturally arose the question as to how the Party was to be reorganised. For a short time the Party functioned in different provinces in different names. Gradually two schools of thought emerged on the problem of reorganisation.

First, there were those Socialists who favoured a loose organisation within the Congress of 'all Augusters' as well as others who accepted the need for militant action. It was felt they should aim at being a group in Congress rather than a definite party and that they should take as their model the loosely knit right wing group which had been led by Sardar Patel.[8] The main

7. Jayaprakash Narayan, *op. cit.*, 'Letter No. 2', pp. 19-20.
8. This group was loose and informal and consisted mainly of leading Congressmen of conservative social and economic views. Members of this group controlled most of the State Congress organisations and governments. The group also had a majority in the Congress Working Committee and wielded powerful influence in

advantage of such an organisation would be that a Socialist group might permanently win over to socialism all those elements which had become really politically conscious only during the August Movement and which might now hesitate to join an organised Socialist Party with 'a rigid ideology and a rigid party rule'.[9]

The other school of thought held that it would be best to revert to a definite Socialist Party, though it need not necessarily be on the old lines. The purpose of the Congress Socialist Party when it was founded in 1934 was not only to give new strength to the nationalist movement but also to work towards the establishment of socialism in India. It was more than ever important to keep these aims steadily in view, particularly at the present time. It was obviously becoming increasingly difficult to work amongst the peasants and workers in the name of the Congress. Moreover, socialism under the direction of organised Socialist parties seemed now to be in the ascendant in the British Commonwealth and in Europe. Particular emphasis was put on the recent success of the British Labour Party in winning power in the United Kingdom.

As most of the Socialist leaders, including Jayaprakash Narayan and Acharya Narendra Deva, belonged to this second school of thought, it was comparatively easy for them, at the Socialists' first post-war conference at Kanpur, to push through a plan for the reconstitution of a specific Socialist Party.

At the Kanpur Conference a significant trend towards a complete separation of the Socialists from the Congress was

the Central Government. The members used to meet informally to determine what course of action to adopt on important issues before the Congress.

9. Jayaprakash Narayan, *The Socialist Way*, Lucknow, 1946, p.5.

already discernible. There was growing antipathy on both sides. The prefix 'Congress' was now dropped from the name of the Party as its continued use was now objected to by the Congress High Command. Moreover, some of the Socialists argued that the time had come for the formation of a distinct Socialist Party in opposition to the Congress. After two years of Congress administration in the provinces there was much dissatisfaction with the alleged lack of achievement.

Nevertheless, the leaders of the Socialist Party, as it now became, were not prepared at Kanpur to take the decisive step of breaking with Congress. This crucial question was therefore postponed until the Nasik Conference in the following year.

The Cabinet Mission Plan and the Socialists

The end of the Second World War saw a Labour Government in office in Britain, a party which during its election campaign had pledged itself to give independence to India in the event of its coming to power. Two World Wars had seriously weakened the British will to continue to dominate the Indian sub-continent. Colonial powers were everywhere in decline and Asian nationalism everywhere in the ascendant. It was now realised both in Britain and in India that Britain was no longer in a position to rule, under the threat of force, a hostile Indian population of 400 million people. In India the change in the balance of forces was well illustrated by the trial of the men belonging to the Indian National Army, the last real attempt of the British to impose their rule of India.

All over India mass demonstrations were held to demand the release of the I. N. A.[10] men on trial, the Congress taking

10. The Indian National Army was organised by Subhas Chandra Bose, a former President of the Congress, from among the Indian troops captured by the Japanese in South East Asia during he Second World War and from other Indian nationals in the area.

up their cause as a national crusade. The agitation gained such momentum as to lead to the disaffection of the Navy. The Naval Mutiny was the last straw for the British resulting, in conjunction with the anti-colonialism of a large section of the Labour Party, in Mr. Attlee's declaration of March 15, 1946. The British Prime Minister, in emphasising the extreme gravity of the situation declared :

> It is no good applying the formula of the past to the present. The temperature of 1946 is not that of 1920, 1930 or even 1942. The slogans of earlier days are discarded. Sometimes, words that seemed at that time to Indians to express the height of their aspirations are now set on one side and other ideas thrust forward.[11]

At the same time, Mr. Attlee assured nationalist opinion in India that 'a minority, this time, shall not be allowed to obstruct the advance of the majority towards freedom'.[12] Thus the deadlock over the question of Indian independence, which had bedevilled the war years, seemed to be broken. Mr. Attlee announced the attention of the British Cabinet to send its own delegation to India to discuss with her leaders the problems involved in transferring power to Indian hands.

As is well known, after about two months of exhausting negotiations, the Cabinet Mission was unable to come to any agreement with the Indian leaders. The Congress was adamant in its stand for an independent undivided India including the princely States and with a strong central government. The Congress was prepared to give what it considered to be adequate safeguards for minority interests but not at the price of a weak

11. Speech in the House of Commons by Prime Minister Attlee, *The Times*, London, March 16, 1946.
12. *Ibid.*

central government. It was most antagonistic to the British insistence on the 'Paramountcy' of the Indian States. The Congress also emphasised that Indians should frame their own constitution without any outside interference, and in an atmosphere of complete freedom. The Muslim League, on the other hand, was equally adamant in its demand for the creation of an independent Islamic state of Pakistan. In this situation the British government was unwilling to hand over power to the Congress alone, as there were powerful lobbies working both in India and in Britain against such a course.

The Cabinet Mission put forward its own proposals to resolve the deadlock on May 16, 1946. In doing so it declared it was guided by what it felt to be 'an almost universal desire, outside the supporters of the Muslim League, for the unity of the country'.[13] The Cabinet Mission put forward the following proposals on the future constitution of India :

(1) There should be a Union of India embracing both British India and the States which should deal with the following subjects; Foreign Affairs, Defence and Communications; it should have the necessary financial resources to exercise these powers.

(2) The Indian Union should have an Executive and a Legislature made up of representatives from both British India and the Indian States. Any question raising a major communal issue in the Legislature should require for its decision, a majority of the representatives present and voting of each of the two major communities, as well as a majority of all the members present and voting.

13. Joint Statement by the Cabinet Mission and the Viceroy of India ; Cited by V. P. Menon, *The Transfer of Power in India*, London, 1957, p. 467.

(3) All subjects, other than Union subjects, and all residuary powers should vest in the provinces.

(4) The provinces should be free to form Groups with Executives and Legislatures of their own, and each Group should have power to determine those provincial matters which could be dealt with on a Group basis.

(5) The Constitutions of the Union and of the Groups should contain a provision whereby any province could, by a majority vote of its Legislative Assembly, call for a reconsideration of the terms of the constitution after an initial period 10 years and at subsequent 10 yearly intervals.[14]

Nationalist leaders in India saw in the Cabinet Mission proposals a further attempt on the part of the British to maintain and perpetuate communal and separatist divisions within the country. They were as critical as ever of the British attitude towards the Princes and minority safeguards and took exception to the very 'weak centre' which was now being proposed.

The Socialists and the leaders of the Congress were agreed that the Cabinet Missions' proposals were quite inadequate. But there was disagreement about what the correct Indian response should be. Broadly speaking, the Socialists favoured the outright rejection of the proposals, whilst the Congress leaders seemed willing to continue negotiations. In an endeavour to ensure the greatest possible degree of Indian unity, Nehru, who had been elected President of the Congress at the A. I. C. C. meeting at Bombay on July 6, 1946, offered Jayaprakash Narayan a seat on the Working Committee. This offer was accepted by

14. *Ibid.*, p. 470.

the Socialist leader, but it failed to lead to unity in outlook on the part of Socialist and Congress leaders.

In the first place, the Congress Working Committee had agreed that Congress would participate in the proposed Constituent Assembly but not in the proposed Interim Government. This was quite unacceptable to the Socialists, who were hostile to the whole idea of a Constituent Assembly before the departure of the British on the grounds that such an Assembly would not enjoy full sovereignty. It was for this reason that the Socialists boycotted the subsequent elections for the Constituent Assembly.

Secondly, the decision of the Working Committee not to participate in the Interim Government was reversed after the departure of the Cabinet Mission for Britain, as a result of further negotiations between Congress leaders and the Government of India. The Viceroy thereupon invited Nehru, the President of the Congress,to assist him in the formation of an Interim Government at the Centre. The Congress decision to participate in the Interim Government was taken at the Wardha meeting of the Working Committee and was sent for ratification to the A. I. C. C.[15] meeting of September 1946. There the Socialists proposed an obstructive amendment to the official resolution moved by Maulana Abdul Kalam Azad. Their amendment sought to direct the representatives of the Congress in the Interim Government to create the necessary conditions for the withdrawal of British troops from India and to endow the Constituent Assembly with fully sovereign powers.

The Socialists' amendment was clearly intended to embarrass both the Congress representatives who had entered the Interim Government and the A. I. C. C. which had accepted the invitation to participate. Yet when it came to the point, the Socialists

15. This meeting was held on August 12, 1946.

were not prepared to vote against Congress participation in the Constituent Assembly and Interim Government. After Nehru, as Congress President, had ruled the Socialist amendment out of order, and the original resolution calling for approval of Congress policy was put, the Socialists abstained from voting.[16] Thus despite the clamour they had made about Congress participation in the Interim Government, the Socialists were not prepared to go to the length of condemning the Congress leaders.

Jayaprakash Narayan called this a positive policy of neutrality which was the only line the Socialist could take at this time. He argued that a vote against the Congress would have signified that the Socialists wanted the withdrawal of its representatives from the Interim Government, and that they were prepared at a critical moment to strike a blow at Congress prestige. On the other hand, Socialist vote for the resolution on this occasion would have implied Socialist support for the Congress forces that stood for communalism.

This policy of neutrality, which characterised the whole attitude of the Socialists at this time, was necessitated by the dilemma with which they were confronted. They had somehow to reconcile their socialism, which demanded an intransigent attitude to British imperialism, with the urgent requirements of Indian nationalism. They wanted to be free to criticise Congress, but were not prepared to go to the length of being unpatriotic. By trying to walk this tight rope they laid themselves open to the charge of confused thinking and inconsistency. For though they managed to disassociate themselves from the communalists, they inevitably aligned themselves with the Congress

16. Proceedings of the All India Congress Committee, N. N. Mitra, *Indian Annual Register*, Calcutta, Vol. I, 1946, p. 224.

'constitutionalists', association with whom they had earlier declared to be profitless.

Meanwhile the Interim Government had become hamstrung because of the entry into it of the representatives of the Muslim League, for whom the principle of joint cabinet responsibility had little or no meaning. It seemed that the sole purpose of the League in joining the Interim Government was to demonstrate that any kind or practical co-operation with the Congress was an impossibility, and that therefore its demand for the creation of Pakistan was fully justified. It was in accordance with this policy that the League withdrew from the Interim Government and the Constituent Assembly, thus preparing the way for the announcement of the Mountbatten Plan of June 3, 1947.

It has been argued that had the British Government shown sufficient firmness in dealing with the demands of the Muslim League, the partition of India might have been avoided. Not only is the British Government to be blamed on this score, but the Congress, and every section of Indian public opinion which it represented, must also accept a major responsibility for the tragedy of partition.

When the Working Committee resolution for the acceptance of the Mountbatten Plan came up for approval before the A. I. C. C., the Socialist's attitude was once again characterised by confusion and indecision. Dr. Lohia argued that the A. I. C. C. members had no option but to abstain from voting. He maintained that the members themselves must accept responsibility for the present situation, since they had lacked the courage earlier on to oppose their leaders. If they had taken a strong line the Mountbatten Plan need never have been accepted. This being so, the members of the A. I.C.C. would scarcely be justified in opposing the Working Committee's resolution. But as

they were not in agreement with the partition plan, it would be equally wrong to support it. The Socialist members of the A. I. C. C. accepted Lohia's arguments in favour of neutrality and abstained from voting.[17]

The psychology of the A. I. C. C. members who voted for the acceptance of the Mountbatten Plan is understandable. By now, most of them were old or middle aged and, as a result of continual imprisonment, had grown tired of arduous struggle. They were unwilling to wait any longer for the achievement of independence, especially when a substantial amount of what they wanted was within their grasp. The mentality of the Congress High Command was well expressed in Nehru's well known speech in the Constituent Assembly on August 14, 1947 :

> Long years ago we made a tryst with destiny, and now the time comes when we shall redeem our pledge, not wholly or in full measure, but very substantially. At the stroke of the midnight hour when the world sleeps India will awake to life and freedom. [18]

It is true that Mahatma Gandhi was against the partition of the country, but even his pleas proved ineffectual against the wishes of the tired members of the A. I. C. C. It has been said that the Mahatma would have been willing to support the Socialists, if they had been prepared to launch a nation wide campaign against the acceptance of the Mountbatten Plan, though he made it clear that he himself would be unable to take any active part in such a movement on account of old age and ill health. But the Socialists refused the Mahatma's offer.

17. *Ibid.*, Vol. I, 1947, pp. 132-3.
18. Speech delivered in the Constituent Assembly of India, New Delhi, August 14, 1947, printed in *Independence and After*, New Delhi, 1949, p. 3.

In the light of this refusal the accusation of Jayaprakash Narayan that the Congress had deviated from 'its true path' by accepting the Mountbatten Plan makes strange reading. Admittedly, the Congress had compromised its principles by failing to secure the independence of a united India. But the behaviour of the Socialists themselves during this tragic period could scarcely be said to be beyond reproach or criticism.

Independence and After

With the achievement of national independence, economic and social questions naturally assumed a position of fundamental importance. For the Socialists, the triumph of nationalism has now to be followed by the triumph of socialism. If freedom was to be a reality to the Indian masses, then gigantic problems of economic and social reconstruction had to be tackled. The important role a Socialist Party could play at this juncture was emphasised at the Kanpur Conference of the Party, where the problem of its relations with the Congress was again taken up. It was felt that the attainment of freedom left the Socialists with two alternative courses of action. Either they could participate fully in the activities of the Congress, giving their full support to the Congress governments which were now established, or they could function as a progressive alternative party to the existing regime, making every effort to convince the people of the importance of their programme and policy.

It was rumoured that Nehru at this stage invited some of the Socialist leaders to join the Central Cabinet, and that a similar gesture was also made by some of the Congress Chief Ministers in the Provinces. The Socialists however, for the time being, chose to remain in the Congress but outside its governments. The Party tried to function as a critical opposition within the Congress. This policy greatly irritated many top officials of

Congress and most of the Ministers. The official attitude was that :

> .....If the Socialist Party do not want to give up the path of co-operation with the Congress, they must not indulge in undisciplined criticism of Congress policy and administration.[19]

The Socialists' strategy of remaining in the Congress, but with complete freedom to criticise everything of which they disapproved, led to a steady deterioration in their relations with the Congress leaders. There were probably two main reasons why they were still reluctant to break away from the Congress. First, it was still too early to assess the direction in which the Congress was leading the country. Secondly—and this may seem extraordinary in view of their past condemnation of his techniques of struggle—there was the influence of Mahatma Gandhi. There is good reason to believe that, after Nehru gave up the presidency of Congress to become Prime Minister, the Mahatma would have liked to see Acharya Narendra Deva nominated as his successor. With one of their leaders holding such high office, the Socialists would have been in a powerful position.

But a Socialist was not acceptable to the right wing majority of the Congress Working Committee led by Sardar Patel. Indeed, it was the dominant position of this group in the Congress that was one of the reasons for the departure of the Socialists after the death of the Mahatma.

Changes in the Congress Constitution

Before the achievement of independence, the Congress was a purely political movement, although many attempts had

19. N. V. Rajkumar, *Indian Political Parties*, New Delhi, 1948, p. 68.

been made by the left wing to get it to formulate a concrete economic programme. Some slight success had been achieved in this respect at the Karachi session of 1931. Nevertheless, the character of the Congress remained substantially unchanged throughout the years preceding independence. It remained an essentially political and nationalist platform where people of the most divergent economic and social views had gathered with but one common aim that the winning of national freedom.

Now that goal was attained, the question of the future role of the Congress was bound to attract the attention of all political leaders. Some looked to the existing Congress organisation as an essential agency for achieving economic reconstruction. Other stressed its role as a political educator. And there were the Gandhians who thought that the political phase of the Congress had been brought to a successful conclusion on August 15, 1947, and that henceforth it should not participate in politics at all, but devote itself to 'Constructive Work' on Gandhian lines. This school of thought had the support of the Mahatma himself. In view of these differences of opinion, the All India Congress Committee appointed a committee to make suggestions for the revision of the Congress constitution 'in view of the new objective before the organisation' in free India.

A large number of suggestions were received by the committee in response to the questionnaire it sent to its subcommittees and to individual Congressmen. When the Working Committee came to discuss the draft recommendations of the committee on reorganisation which suggested that the Congress must now function as a political party, Mahatma Gandhi objected that 'the proposed changes would not meet the requirements

of the new situation.[20] The Working Committee therefore postponed its discussion and asked him to state his own views. This he accordingly did in a draft proposal handed over to the Working Committee on January 30, 1948, only a few hours before his assassination. From this paper it is evident that the Mahatma held a radically different view of the future of the Congress from that of the Working Committee. In effect, he suggested that the Congress should be disbanded because it had outlived its usefulness as a vehicle of political propaganda and parliamentary activity :

> Though split into two, India having attained political independence through means desired by the Indian National Congress, the Congress in its present shape and form, i. e. as a propaganda vehicle and parliamentary machine, has outlived its use. India has still to attain social, moral and economic independence in terms of its seven hundred thousand villages as distinguished from its cities and towns. The struggle for the ascendancy of civil over military power is bound to take place in India's progress towards its democratic goal. It must be kept out of unhealthy competition with political parties and communal bodies. For these and other similar reasons, the A. I. C. C. resolves to disband the existing Congress organisation and flower into a Lok Sevak Sangh.[21]

These views of the Mahatma were quite unacceptable to the members of the Working Committee. They wanted to transform the Congress into a full fledged political party and, to this end, to give it the appropriate new constitution. And this is what they accordingly did on the basis of the

20. N. V. Rajkumar, *Development of the Congress Constitution*, New Delhi, 1949, p. 97.
21. *Ibid.*, Appendix II

recommendations of the reorganisation committee. The Congress thus lost its historic character as a national movement.

The new Congress constitution which laid down the qualifications necessary for Primary and Effective members and also for membership of Panchayet, District and Provincial Congress Committees struck a severe blow at the Socialist Party, and it was undoubtedly one of the chief reasons for the Socialists' decision to break away.

Under the new constitution, members of other political parties, provided they were non-communal, were to be allowed to enrol themselves as members of the Congress. But they were to be debarred from holding any office in the organisation.[22] This hit the Socialists hard as they were still hoping to be able to influence the policy and programme of the Congress by their presence in the higher levels of the organisation. This was now made impossible by the changes in the constitution unless they were prepared to disband the Socialist Party.

The Socialists felt particularly aggrieved as they held that they themselves had gone a long way towards meeting the wishes of the Congress High Command with regard to the organisational structure of their own Party. As Acharya Narendra Deva pointed out at the Nasik Conference of the Party :

> Once the Congress President asked us to drop the prefix 'Congress' from the Party name. He also pleaded that our Party doors be thrown open to non-Congressmen. He suggested that this would enable us to continue in the Congress. We did all that at Kanpur. Today they have

22. See Appendix II for the clauses of the Congress Constitution with regard to membership.

adopted a constitution which has left us no other alternative.[23]

Acharya Narendra Deva maintained that though the Socialists had been in no special hurry to leave the Congress, their break away was now made inevitable by the revised Congress constitution. He emphasised that the professed aims and beliefs of the Congress did not accord with the actions of its Ministers. He instanced the assurances given by Sardar Patel to Indian capitalists to the effect that they had nothing to fear from the Congress governments, and the inclusion of the late Shanmukham Chetty in the government to represent their interests. He charged the Congress with trying to play a double game. It was compelling the Socialist Party to leave the Congress and at the same time asking the members of the Muslim League, the Hindu Mahasabha and other communal and sectarian organisations to disband with a view to their joining the Congress. The Acharya accused the Congress leadership of double standards with regard to secularism. 'When it talks of secularism, it does not mean it'. And as a proof, he pointed to the presence of communal leaders like Dr. Shyama Prasad Mukherjee in the central cabinet.

Finally, the Acharya declared that the Congress had become lifeless. There were growing signs of a tendency towards authoritarianism and any criticism of the deficiencies of the Congress governments was stigmatised as unpatriotic.

The Socialist analysis at the Nasik Conference of the Indian political situation at this time, under the spur of the changed Congress constitution, was more biting than usual :

The re-alignment of political and class forces brought about by the enforcement of the Mountbatten Plan has

23. *Report of the Sixth Conference of the Socialist Party*, Bombay, 1948, p. 15.

developed four main political currents. The first, and the most dangerous, represents the communal forces backed by the wealth and influence of vested rights. Its contribution to the freedom struggle was negative and obstructive, yet it has gained immensely through the achievement of freedom through partition. The communal reflexes are being shamelessly exploited by these political forces and the culmination of their efforts was the cruel assassination of Mahatma Gandhi. These reactionary forces seek to blast the democratic and secular basis of the Indian State; they strive to sap rational thinking and foster mass irrationalism. They constitute, with their mediaeval outlook, subterranean and irrational methods, indifference to all human values save the crudest and the rawest instincts, the most serious menace to the foundation of the new State.[24]

Thus, the most dangerous political current at this time, according to the Socialists, was the way in which the Congress leaders were hobnobbing with notorious communalists and other 'reactionary elements'. The overtures being made to communal bodies by Sardar Patel, who was regarded as the 'strong man' of Congress, were viewed with especial alarm by the Socialists.

The second main political current at this time, according to the Socialists, was communism, which although poles apart from communalism, was nevertheless declared to 'be equally adventurist'. The main strength of the Communists lay in the fact that they might be able to make political capital out of the resistance to all social and economic change being put up by the 'die-hard' upholders of the status quo. Both the communalists and the

24. *Report of the Sixth Conference of the Socialist Party*, Bombay, 1948, p. 36.

communists were lumped together as equal sources of danger to the stability of the new state. It was thought that the primary task of the Socialist Party should be 'to isolate these fringes from the main stream' of Indian political life.

The two other main political currents, according to the Socialists' analysis at the Nasik Conference, were the Congress and the Socialist Party itself. With regard to the Congress, it was argued that it could not change its class character and be an effective instrument for the achievement of socialism because of its 'total identification' with the government point of view, and because of 'its refusal to support the social struggle of the masses'.[25] The revolutionary tradition of the Congress in the colonial period had been built up on an anti-government basis. If it aspired to regain this tradition and become a real instrument of social and economic revolution, then it would have to extricate itself from its present domination by the Central and provincial governments. Since the Congress was quite clearly incapable of adopting such a course of action there was a paramount need for another political party.

The Socialists at Nasik were convinced that it was impossible to attain stability in India, as it then was, because of 'the grave economic inequalities and privations' suffered by the masses. These conditions could be changed only by 'fundamentally redefining the pattern of economic institutions', and such a change could be brought about only by a socialist party dedicated to the achievement of a socialist state.[26] Since the doors of the Congress were now in effect barred to them, and they saw no likelihood of a socialist orientation in its programme, the only alternative to the disbanding of the Party was 'to march ahead with the banner of democratic socialism' without the Congress.

25. *Ibid.*, p. 37.
26. *Ibid.*

Thus the Socialists at Nasik crossed the Rubicon. The decision to break with the Congress was a great ordeal for many of the leaders, and it caused much heart-searching amongst party members. It meant breaking off the intimate associations of more than a decade and parting with comrades in the freedom struggle with whom they had shared prison cells. As Acharya Narendra Deva movingly confessed at Nasik :

> Quitting the Congress is not a pleasant affair. I have been a Congress worker for the last thirty years. I am leaving the associations of all those years. I am leaving behind good friends. Politics is a very strange thing. In politics friends become foes.[27]

Nevertheless, despite the breaking of personal ties the decision to break with the Congress was at bottom a popular one in the Party. Except for a few isolated instances, most of the Party members all over India resigned from the Congress in support of the decision to separate. The most significant reaction came from the twelve members of the U. P. legislative assembly who promptly resigned their seats.

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27. *Ibid.*, p. 15.

CHAPTER 5 THE SOCIALIST PARTY AFTER THE BREAK WITH THE CONGRESS 1948-52

The period to which we must now turn was one of the most important in the history of the Party. Up to now its aims and ideals had won the sympathetic support of many Indians, including some of the leading Congressmen. But the fact was the Socialists had enjoyed a prestige which was out of all proportion to their real strength in the country. That prestige had been derived mainly from their close association with the Congress. After the break with the parent organisation in 1948, the Socialists were entering on a new adventure. Clearly the Party would have to apply itself to the task of winning mass support for itself if it was ever to become a political force in its own right. The main strength of the Socialists in 1948 was confined to some of the industrial centres, to the peasantry of certain provinces and to the students of most of the universities in Bombay and Northern India. But this sectional support, however important in itself, was no match for the mass following of the Congress throughout the country. At the Nasik Conference some thought had been given to the problem of how to compete effectively with the Congress, but it was not until the Patna Conference of 1949 that its real urgency was fully appreciated.

From Nasik onwards, the watchwords of the Socialists were 'struggle, constructive work and parliamentary activities'. They felt that in a country like India, burdened as it was with all sorts of age-old prejudices, and where all kinds of social, economic and political injustices were prevalent, they would need to cast their

net as wide as possible if they were to succeed. The struggle against tradition and conservatism could not be waged effectively unless the Party could put down deep roots amonst the masses.

The statement of policy issued after the Patna Conference envisaged that the means to be adopted for the winning of mass support should vary according to circumstances; they might be peaceful or violent, depending on the specific political situation.[1] This was in keeping with the general strategy of the Party in the post-independence period. Broadly speaking, the Socialists considered there were two ways of capturing power, insurrectionary and democratic.

The democratic method, if resorted to, was to include both parliamentary and extra-parliamentary activities, such as the political education of the masses, the propagation of socialist ideas and the resort to strikes and civil resistance. But it was thought that democratic methods could be used for the capture of power only where 'full political democracy' was already functioning, and where the working class, peasantry and lower middle class had already reached a high level of maturity and had created a powerful political party of their own. In the absence of these conditions, the democratic method was declared to be ineffective and 'dangerous'.[2]

The logical conclusion to be drawn from such an analysis is that the Party ought to have been in favour of insurrectionary methods as a means of winning political power at this time. Though political parties of a kind certainly existed and had freedom to organise and to pursue their objectives, the 'democratic' conditions referred to by the policy statement of the Socialists did not exist. Nevertheless, largely under the influence

1. *Statement of Policy of the Socialist Party*, Bombay, 1951, pp. 15-16.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 16.

of the leaders, the Party declared itself in favour of democratic methods.

Trade Union Activities

Accordingly, the Socialists turned their attention to the trade union front, the importance of which had already been stressed by resolutions of the National Executive in June 1947. During this period the Socialists participated in a number of strikes of varying dimensions. Although they were economic in origin it was realised that political capital might be made out of all of them.

One of the special aims of the Party was to try and persuade trade unions to leave the All India Trade Union Congress because of its domination by the Communists. At the other extreme, the Party endeavoured to detach trade unions from the All India National Trade Union Congress, on the grounds that this was a pro-Congress and therefore pro-government organisation and, as a consequence, not a suitable instrument to defend the workers' rights and promote their welfare.

Asok Mehta who was in charge of the Party's trade union activities, and mainly responsible for its policy in this field, defended the Socialists' campaign against the INTUC as follows :

> The keystone of the arch of the INTUC is arbitration in industrial disputes.... I am a believer in arbitration in industrial disputes. But I cannot accept it as the sheet anchor of trade unionism....
>
> So long as the Congress remains what it is, there must inevitably develop an estrangement between it and the organised working class. The deadlock will be avoided either by the Congress becoming in place of the Indian National Congress.....the Indian Socialist Congress, or the TUC forfeiting its independence and integrity. The

> Socialists should therefore keep away from both organisations and build up a workers' movement that will have in it the vitality and the vision to realise a powerful Socialists Party capable of reshaping, along democratic lines, the destinies of free India.[3]

The stage for a Socialist trade union organisation was thus set, and after a short interval, during which Socialist influenced trade unions were organised as Hind Mazdoor Panchayats at provincial level, the Hind Mazdoor Sabha was created in 1949.

The main strength of the new organisation lay in Bombay, Delhi, Bihar, Hyderabad and U. P. Efforts were also made to draw into the new body all non-Congress and non-Communist trade unions, though very limited success was achieved in this respect. Only R. S. Rukir's group co-operated with the Hind Mazdoor Sabha and then only for a short time. Apart from the above mentioned regions where it was influential, the Hind Mazdoor Sabha was strongest in the Railwaymens', Postmens' and Defence Workers' Unions, in all of which organisations Socialist leaders held important offices.[4]

At the time of its formation, the Hind Mazdoor Sabha claimed a membership of five millions, evidence of the activity of the Socialist Party in the trade union field at this time. Spurred on by these successes the Socialists organised a number of important strikes. The most notable were those of the Postal Workers, the Delhi Cloth Mill, the Bombay Textile Workers, the Rohtas

3. Asoka Mehta, 'Objectives of Labour—Can the INTUC Help to Achieve them ? *Janata* II, May 25, 1947, p. 7.

4. For a number of years, Jayaprakash Narayan was president of the Railwaymens' and Postmens' Unions, and S. M. Joshi, the Maharashtra Socialist leader is still president of the Defence Workers' Union.

Industries and the Coal Miners of Bihar. The threatened strike of the Railwaymen in 1949 was averted at the last minute.

Organisation of the Peasantry

As we have already seen, the organisation of the peasantry had always been a major plank in the Party's platform. After their separation from the Congress, the Socialists intensified their activities in this field. Earlier on a Kisan Sub-Committee had been formed by the National Executive to go into the question of ways and means of extending the Party's influence amongst the peasants, and at the Nasik Conference the need for an All India Peasant's Organisation under socialist influence had been stressed. Added importance was attached to this field of activity because of the Communists' domination of the All India Kisan Sabha, which, like the All India Trade Union Congress, had fallen under their control during the war. The Communists had been able to profit from the fact that most of the Socialist and Congress leaders interested in the trade union and peasant movements were in goal. It was in an effort to check the influence of the communists over the peasant movement that the Socialists had set up the Hind Kisan Panchayat in 1949.

The approach of the Party to the peasant question was certainly one of considerable militancy in the post-war years. From 1947 to 1949 many Satyagrahas, both large and small, were launched in attempts to get the grievances of the peasants redressed. The most important of these were those organised in the Deoria district of U. P., the Bakasht Sangharsh in Bihar, the Adivasi Satyagraha in Madhya Bharat and the Canal and Land Redistribution movements in Vindhya Pradesh. In this agitation Party workers used both violence and the threat of violence.[5] But

5. *Report of the Sixth Conference of the Socialist Party*, Bombay, 1948, p. 109.

violent methods were employed only when the peasants were faced by particularly recalcitrant landlords or zamindars. All these struggles did something towards spreading socialist influence into the remote parts of rural India. Peasant organisations under the influence and guidance of the Party sprang up in a number of provinces and regions, notably Assam, Bihar, Maharashtra, Tamilnad, Malabar, Orissa, Vindhya Pradesh and U. P.

The main demands of the Party on the peasant question remained as before—the remission of land revenue, the abolition of Zamindari without compensation and the redistribution of land. To popularise these demands peasant demonstrations were periodically organised all over the country. Three of these are worth mentioning. At each of the Patna and Lucknow demonstrations on November 30, 1949, about 1,00,000 peasants are reported to have participated, some of those attending having travelled on foot distances of from 50 to 200 miles.[6] The third large demonstration was at Delhi in 1951 and was organised on all India basis. This too was a great success, being attended by from 70,000 to 1,00,000 people, though it never achieved a true all India character owing to the remoteness of Delhi from the main centres of peasant unrest.

The ostensible purpose of these peasant demonstrations was to present to the provincial governments concerned a charter of agrarian demands with a request for immediate implementation.[7] But the Party organisers were well aware that the Congress governments would be most unlikely to respond to these demands, and only the most naive of the peasants expected any immediate results. The real purpose of the demonstrations was to show the influence of the Party amongst the peasantry and from all accounts some success was achieved.

6. *The National Herald*, Lucknow, Dec. 1, 1949.

7. *The Indian Nation*, Patna, Dec. 1. 1949.

The agitation phase was followed by attempts at constructive activity. The Party now coined the phrase—'Ek Ghanta Desh Ko' (One hour to the country) as a slogan for its peasant programme. A plan of work was laid down by the National Executive for the guidance of all Party workers in the countryside which included giving aid to the villagers in the building of roads, canals, bunds and wells. And a village reconstruction conference was organised at Dekuli in Bihar in February 1951.

This constructive programme was carried out mainly in those areas where the Party had been most active during the agitation phase, but less success was achieved. The fact is there was division of opinion amongst the Socialists about the real worth of such activities. Ever since the birth of the Congress Socialist Party the Marxist majority in the Party had regarded the constructive village programme of Mahatma Gandhi as essentially 'reactionary'. Many of the workers in the Party were still of this opinion. They were quite opposed to the adoption of Gandhian techniques because they regarded them as basically non-socialist in character. They therefore refused to participate in this kind of work. This was one of the reasons why this programme was never launched on an All India basis.

This dogmatic adherence to Marxist ideology and hostility to Gandhism on the part of many of the Socialists was a handicap to them in their village work. There is no denying that the much derided constructive programme at this time helped the Party to extend its influence in those rural areas where it was adopted. The Marxists failed to see how difficult it would be to translate their own ideology into terms that could be understood by simple, illiterate villagers.

The Party Influence over Youth Movements

Owing to the militant role it had played during the August

Movement of 1942, the Congress Socialist Party had been successful in capturing the imagination of the younger section of the national movement, particularly the student movement. Jayaprakash Narayan and other Socialist leaders had great prestige amongst the students many of whom had actively co-operated in the sabotage policy of 1942. This of course was due to some extent to the fact that the leadership of the Party itself had much of the ebullience of youth in contrast to the caution of the ageing leaders of the Congress. At the provincial level many leaders of the Party were ex-student leaders. All these factors combined to give the Party a good opportunity to enrol educated youth within its ranks. But before we discuss the various steps taken by the Socialists to strengthen their position amongst the students we should remind ourselves of the past history of the Student Movement.

We have already mentioned in Chapter I how the formation of youth organisations in the late 1930s and early 1940s was bound up with the growth of the left wing in India.[8] In pursuance of their policy of winning the support of the students, the Socialists had been instrumental in the formation of the All India Student's Federation. But this body, like others, came under the domination of the Communists during the United Front period and completely passed into their hands during the Second World War. In response to this challenge, the Socialists and other nationalists formed a new organisation, the All India Student's Congress in 1945. Largely owing to its pro-war outlook which was naturally considered by many students to be anti-national, the Communist dominated All India student's Federation soon began to lose influence to the Student's Congress, which on account of the support it gave to the national movement soon built itself up into the position of the main student body. Now it

8. Vide Chapter I under 'The Youth Movement'.

had been felt by many of the Congress and Socialist leaders that the whole purpose of the All India Student's Congress was simply to enrol the students in the national struggle, and that when this objective was achieved with the winning of independence, the organisation should be disbanded. A decision to dissolve the Student's Congress was accordingly taken at its Mysore Conference in 1948. And the Socialists themselves supported this move. Yet from the point of view of political strategy this was probably a mistake. The Student's Congress, with all the prestige it had acquired in the colonial period, had become an excellent forum for student opinion, and in a country where students will always be politically minded and will always be easily influenced by one political party or another, this organisation might have continued to function as a political kindergarten for the Socialists.

The attitude of the Congress to these developments is of course easy to understand. The Student Congress which had become a powerful force in its own right was strongly opposed to the Congress governments treatment of higher education, and it had consequently organised strikes in various provinces. After the achievement of independence the Congress leaders were prompt to discourage any further participation of students in politics and did not hesitate to condemn even non-political activity as political in character. For instance, the All India agitation against the increase in tuition fees, which was seized on by the Student Congress as a serious grievance, greatly irritated the Congress Ministries. They imagined, quite erroneously, that the dissolution of the Student Congress would silence the students. And they were supported in these views by the Congress-minded section of the Student Congress itself which had agreed to the dissolution decision.

After the Hyderabad Conference in 1948 the Student Congress practically disintegrated, although splinter groups in various

States continued to function under the old name. These groups consisted mainly of those students who sympathised with the aspirations of the Forward Block and the Revolutionary Socialist Party. Subsequently, the Socialists made some attempt to organise their own youth movement. A youth sub-committee of the National Executive of the Party was formed for this purpose, and for some time youth committees functioned in different areas under various names. In 1950 they were grouped under the name of Samajwadi Yuwak Sabha (Young Socialist League), except in Maharashtra where the Party was especially interested in building up the Rashtra Seva Dal, a volunteer youth organisation. The Samajwadi Yuwak Sabha however made little headway, except in U. P. and to some extent in Andhra. It was not even organised on an all-India basis until 1953.

From 1950 onwards, efforts were also made by the Socialist leaders to build up a non-political student movement on the lines of the National Union of Students in the United Kingdom. In this they had the support of a number of top ranking Congressmen and some of the leading educationalists in the country. An all India Convention of students organised at Bombay in September 1950 was well attended by student bodies, possibly because in order to emphasise its non-partisan character both Nehru and Narayan were invited to speak from the same platform. High hopes were raised at this stage for the future of the new body, but no sooner had the Conference begun its programme than internal squabbles gained the upper hand. Most of the time the Conference dissipated its energy trying to resolve disputes between the various delegates. Although a National Committee was finally formed on a compromise basis, with a Socialist as president and a Congressman as general secretary, and with a majority of Socialists on the Committee, the initial enthusiasm for the organisation soon disappeared.

Thus the first attempt to form a non-partisan student organisation, devoted wholly to the interests of the student community, met with only very limited success. Nevertheless, it is significant that the Party continued to be popular with the students. If we look at the election results of University and College Student Unions we find Socialists, or those in sympathy with socialism, holding high office all over India. It may seem strange that the Party was not able to make more of the opportunities that offered in this field and bring into the fold many more recruits than it actually did. But organisation has never been the strong point of most of the Socialist leaders and so the student support received was not as considerable as it might have been.

The Party's Parliamentary Activities

Though a deep vein of scepticism about the value of parliamentary democracy had always been a pronounced feature of the Party's ideology, it was recognised by the Socialists when they separated from the Congress that in an India committed to constitutional government they would have to prove themselves by winning Parliamentary seats. In the colonial period they had had two opportunities to contest elections, in 1937 and 1945, under the Government of India Act. But most of them had refrained from doing so. And in 1946 the Socialists boycotted the elections to the Constituent Assembly. However, when they parted company with the Congress in 1948, it was decided by the National Executive of the Party that all Socialist members of the various legislatures who had been elected as Congress candidates should resign their seats. The main purpose of this ruling was, of course, both to test the popularity of the Party at the polls and also to set an example of political morality.

Accordingly, all twelve Socialist members of the U. P. Assembly resigned their seats. All of them fought the by-elections that

followed and all but one were defeated. This was a disastrous blow to all the Party leaders, though this serious political reverse was offset to some extent by the results in the Bombay Corporation elections. Here the Socialists won 26 out of the total of 49 seats they contested, and although they continued to be a minority in the Council, this Bombay success was to outlast all the later shocks experienced by the Socialists at the first general election. But the defeat at the U. P. elections raised serious doubts amongst some of the rank and file members of the Party. Their Marxist-Leninist ideology, and the realisation of what a formidable party machine the Congress could range against them, conspired to undermine any faith they might have had in the effectiveness of the parliamentary system as a vehicle for the socio-economic changes which they sought to bring about in India.[9]

On the other hand, the main effect of the U. P. election reverses on the Socialist leaders was to convince them of the necessity of bringing about structural changes in the Party's organisation. The fact is that since its birth in 1934, whatever might have been said from time to time about the need for winning mass support, the Party had really resembled nothing so much as the exclusive club of a political elite. During its early years this had not been a major disadvantage as its main function during the struggle for independence had been to try and influence

9. Important Congress leaders like Pandit Pant, the present Home Minister of the Central Government and the then Chief Minister of U. P. had alleged that the election of the Socialists would mean the extinction of Indian culture.
For a detailed account of the allegations of the Congress leaders against the Socialists see B. Singh Vinod, *Hindustan Fascism Ki Or* (India on the Way Towards Fascism), Banaras, 1949.

Congress policy in a socialist direction. But now that the Socialists had to compete with the Congress for popular support, they would clearly have to open their doors wide to all that might be induced to enter. It was the question of what changes should be made that became the main topic of discussion at the important Patna Conference of the Party in 1949.

Changes in the Party Structure

At Patna, the need for drastic changes in the Party's structure was emphasised in the presidential address of Acharya Narendra Deva and in the report of the general secretary, Jayaprakash Narayan. The former criticised the constitution of the Party as completely unsuited to meet the new requirements arising out of the separation from the Congress and the consequent need to secure a mass vote :

> It needs revision and the Party has to be reconstituted on a new basis. At present it is a party of the select, but if we want to achieve our objectives and want to be treated as a serious alternative to the Congress, we must broad base ourselves.[10]

To provide for what were considered to be the necessary changes, a new constitution modelled on the constitutions of the British Labour Party was put before the Conference. Two of its chief features were the introduction of mass individual membership and of affiliated membership as a means of greatly widening the appeal of the Party. The case for the proposed changes was well put by Acharya Narendra Deva :

> We cannot prove equal to our task if we do not throw our doors open to all those who subscribe to the constitution and programme of the Party. We should affiliate to the Party

10. *Report of the Seventh Conference of the Socialist Party*, Bombay, 1949, p. 30.

all those Trade Unions, Kisan Panchayats, Socialist Youth Leagues, Co-operative Societies and other similar organisations which accept by a resolution the programme and policy of the Party. Individual members who accept our Socialist principles and agree to abide by disciplinary rules of the Party should also be admitted. In the present situation, when owing to the deteriorating economic situation even the black-coated classes are joining the ranks of the workers, we shall not be taking too great a risk in admitting members of these classes to our Party. Some risks are of course involved in taking middle class men into the party, but with a little discrimination and caution we can certainly avoid that risk.[11]

These proposals were severely criticised by some of the delegates at Patna, who felt that the adoption of a constitution on these lines would result in the Party losing all its revolutionary character. They held that the proposed introduction of mass individual membership would result in the domination of the Party by middle class elements. Though they themselves were largely middle class in origin, the leaders still liked to think of the Party as essentially a 'workers' Party'. One of the leading critics, Rama Nandan Mishra argued that what was really needed was a party of 'select revolutionaries'.[12] The coming in of people belonging to different classes might cause internal controversy and dissension. The proposed changes were good only if democratic socialism was to be equated with constitutional socialism. But 'a party of revolutionaries cannot afford the luxury of a constitution which can lead them only to constitutional

11. Acharya Narendra Deva, *RASTRIYATA AUR SAMAJWAD*, Banaras, 1950, pp. 372-73.
12. *Report of the Seventh Conference of the Socialist Party*, p. 78.

socialism'.[13] Many of the critics at Patna took very much the same line. They were sceptical of the value of trying to fit the Party for what they contemptuously called 'constitutional socialism', when there seemed to be so little constitutionalism in India at that time, i. e. members of the Party were being arrested and their public meetings were being prohibited by the Congress on what were considered to be the flimsiest of pretexts.

The reasons for the opposition at Patna to the proposed changes in the Party's constitution are not far to seek. Many members, as we have had occasion to stress already, were convinced Marxist-Leninists. They therefore accepted the validity of the Leninist dictum that revolutionary changes in any society can be brought about only by the organisation of a political elite. Schooled in Marxist ideology (the air at Patna was thick) with quotations from the works of Marx, Engels and Lennin' most of the Party delegates were contemptuous of parliamentary elections and legislatures as essentially reformist. It was argued that the amendments to the constitution would have the effect of turning the Party into an electoral machine rather than a vehicle for revolutionary social change, with the result that there would be a drift towards parliamentarianism, the very negation of the doctrine of revolutionary socialism.

It must be confessed that the prevailing political situation in the country contributed to reinforce the vehemence of the opposition delegates to the Patna proposals. The disinclination of the ruling Congress to contemplate the rise of any opposition had come as a great surprise to the Socialists. They had not expected their ex-colleagues to abuse them as they had done. The campaign of vilification conducted by the Congress against the Socialists at the U. P. bye-elections, especially against their

13. *Ibid.*

respected leader, Acharya Narendra Deva, came as special shock. Moreover, many obstacles had been put in the way of the Socialists' day to day activities. Party workers had been arrested all over the country on the most specious grounds and under laws which had previously been used by the colonial administration against the Congress leaders themselves. The scepticism of the Socialist rank and file about the effectiveness of parliamentary democracy as an instrument for social change, which had been fostered by their Marxist ideology, was therefore still further deepened by the Congress's alleged disregard for constitutional practices.

Acharya Narendra Deva, the president of the Party at the Patna Conference, was hard pressed by the opposition challenge. He paid tribute to the sincerity of those who genuinely believed that the indiscriminate admission of individual members could not be altogether free from risk, and that the proposed changes might result in under-mining the revolutionary character of the Party. But he greatly regretted the tendency amongst some in the Party to try and keep it a 'closed shop' for a select few :

> I cannot refrain from observing that a tendency is visible in the Party which resolutely sets its face against new-comers in its excessive desire to keep the Party a close preserve for themselves. It is an unfortunate development which must be combated if the Party is to grow. Accession of fresh blood should always be welcome. The Party cannot be allowed to become the monopoly of the few, and every genuine Socialist has a right to be taken into the Party. Such a narrow attitude would be a betrayal of the Socialist cause. It is nothing short of self-conceit and over-weening pride which betrays such a lamentable lack of appreciation of the reality of the situation. It is a plain truth that unless the

Party assumes a mass character it cannot perform the tasks which it has set before it.[14]

Such plain speaking from Acharya Narendra Deva was not without effect at Patna. The respect and prestige he enjoyed amongst the Socialist rank and file, both on account of his integrity as a political leader and his reputation as a scholar, was immense. Many of the critics of the new constitution changed their minds, after hearing his defence of it, in the belief that if such a distinguished Socialist could support it, then it must be in accordance with the teachings of Marx. As we have already remarked, the Acharya was considered to be the greatest authority on Marxism in India, and whenever there was a crisis in the Party or when new policies were being debated, his approval was always considered essential in order to give a lead to the rank and file.

Jayaprakash Narayan, the secretary general also persuasively argued in favour of the adoption of the proposed changes. He defended them on the grounds that they were intended to strengthen the Party and that they would not deprive it of its revolutionary character. He asked the delegates to judge them by one criterion. Could they lead the Party forward and help it to achieve its goal ? If they could, then minor defects could be eliminated by trial and experience. He called on the Party members not to fight shy of constitutional activity, ingeniously appealing to the history of the Russian revolution for support :

> .....the Bolshevik Party did not desist from fighting on the constitutional front, even though the Czarist Duma offered no opportunity for social change by constitutional means.[15]

14. Acharya Narendra Deva. *op. cit.*, pp. 373-74.
15. *Report of the Seventh Conference of the Socialist Party*, p. 87.

With equal ingenuity he pointed to Britain as proof of the contribution which the middle classes could make to the growth and development of a working class party :

> The British Labour Party is a working class party but it did not come to power until it had attracted the general sympathy of the middle classes. Recent historical experience has proved that the support of the middle classes is necessary for all revolutionary parties.[16]

Over the question of the collective affiliation of class organisations to the Party, he declared that this was in keeping with the teachings of Marx, since the affiliation of workers' and peasants' organisations 'helps to sharpen class struggle'. It also helped a revolutionary party to keep in touch with realities and to strengthen its working class character.

Narayan then contested the argument that the increasingly authoritarian Congress was drifting in the direction of Fascism, and that therefore it was vital for the Socialist Party to retain its elite character. Many of the critics at Patna had wanted to reject the new constitution on the grounds that, since no civil liberties existed under Congress rule, there was therefore no hope of a peaceful, i.e. constitutional achievement of a socialist society. Contesting this view, Narayan argued that Fascism was a socio-economic phenomenon which arose at a certain stage and under certain conditions in the evolution of capitalism. Hitler had been able to establish Fascism in Germany because of the feelings of resentment and national humiliation aroused in the German people against the victorious powers. He was able to exploit successfully the national and racial pride of the German masses and the frustration of the middle and lower middle classes. Fascism thus arose in Germany because of

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16. *Ibid.*, p. 88.

particular psychological factors which were largely absent in India. He forcibly rejected the argument that Fascism was already firmly established in India.[17]

Narayan concluded by saying that 'constitutions do not make any party revolutionary'. The important thing was to understand a given situation realistically and to act in accordance with that situation.

After a long and stormy debate the new constitution was adopted by the Conference by a vote of 305 to 95. That the opposition did not give up without a struggle is evident from Anna Despande's amendment demanding the exclusion from membership of any person who was a willing party to any form of economic exploitation. But this amendment was rejected by 184 to 172.

Broadly speaking, the new constitution was pushed through auo at Patna largely beesef the unanimity amongst the top leaders of the Party. There were only two dissenters amongst the leaders, Rama Nandan Mishra and Mrs. Aruna Asaf Ali, and the latter left the Conference in the middle of the proceedings. It would thus have been a stupendous task for Mishra to hold out successfully against the 'united front' put up by Jayaprakash Narayan, Asoka Mehta, Ram Manohar Lohia and Achyuta Patwardhan. After both Acharya Narendra Deva and Yusuf Meharally had given their blessing to the proposals, it is surprising that the opposition managed to muster as many votes as they did.

The debate at the Patna Conference is interesting because of the light it throws on the complicated psychology of both the leaders and rank and file of the Socialist Party. We have already said that the key to an understanding of this psychology

17. *Ibid.*, p. 91.

is the problem of how to fuse Indian Socialism's three component parts, with all their contradictory implications i.e., Gandhism, Marxism-Leninism and Social Democracy. How are these three strands to be woven into a synthesis? At Patna the problem of Gandhism did not arise. It was a straight tussle between Marxism-Leninism and Social Democracy. And inevitably there was much confused thinking.

As we have already pointed out, the political situation in the country had strongly coloured the attitude of the opposition delegates at Patna. One can understand the resentment felt at the dictatorial policy of the Congress governments at this time. All the Socialists, and in fact the entire progressive opposition, were most critical of the power which Sardar Patel wielded both in the Congress and in the Government. They regarded him as the 'arch reactionary' in Indian politics, and he was indeed a right wing leader of the most conservative views.[18] But to argue that Patel was leading India towards Fascism was to misread the situation entirely.

The Congress had a long democratic tradition and it would have been impossible, even for a politician as astute as Patel, to turn it into a totalitarian organisation, like the Nazi Party. What is just as important, India, unlike Germany, had not suffered any national humiliation. Indeed, there was abounding self-confidence as a result of the triumphant conclusion to the freedom struggle. And there were people inside the Congress who were well aware that the prestige of the Indian national

18. An interesting account of Patel's attitude towards the Socialists can be found in Myron Winer, *Party Politics in India*, London, 1957, pp. 55-56.
For the Socialists attitude towards Patel see Asoka Mehta, *Economic Consequences of Sardar Patel*, Bombay, 1949.

revolution in the outside world stemmed from its faith in the values of liberal democracy. These people were responsible leaders and would have resisted any attempt to bring about a Fascist regime as wholeheartedly as the Socialists. We therefore cannot accept the conclusions put forward by the opponents of the new constitution at Patna. Their notion that parliamentary government was failing and that they should therefore retain their elite character in order to be able to fight the more effectively another elite, the Fascists, was quite unfounded.

The dissensions that arose at Patna over the question of the Party's structure must be attributed to the different perspectives of the two groups concerned. The members of the opposition group were quite unable to comprehend the changed situation in India brought about by the withdrawal of British power. The whole of their past political thinking, founded as it was on Marxism-Leninism, had led them to believe that it was impossible for British imperial rule to come to an end comparatively peacefully, as in fact had been the case. The blame for this miscalculation must not be put entirely at their door. They had been told by the Party leaders time and again that the peaceful withdrawal of British rule from India was quite impossible. Even in 1946 most of the Socialist leaders still could not grasp the significance of the fundamental changes which the Second World War had brought about in the fortunes of the British Empire. If the leaders were slow to change, it was inevitable that the rank and file should continue to think along the old lines of violence, insurrection and distrust of parliamentary government. After all, it had been at the express call of the leaders that the Party had boycotted the elections to the Constituent Assembly on the grounds that they were 'phoney'.

By the time of the Patna Conference the Socialist leaders

had begun to grasp the implications of the new situation. They realised that they would now somehow have to square their Marxism-Leninism with the parliamentary government to which India was now committed. It was only right therefore that the leaders should take the initiative in proposing such changes in the Party structure as would fit it for its new constitutional role. But they should have prepared the way for these proposed changes by prior consultation and discussion with rank and file members at the district level. In this way, they would have been able to create the necessary climate of opinion amongst those members who were still dominated by Marxism-Leninism. As it was, there was a complete absence of such 'softening-up' tactics. Many of the bewildered delegates at Patna felt that a wrong decision was imposed on them by the leaders, and there was much justifiable resentment.

The Party's New Constitution

We must now consider how far the expectations placed in the new constitution were realised. At the Eighth Conference of the Party at Madras in 1950, the individual membership was reported to be 129,447. This was no mean achievement considering the Party's lack of funds and the limited number of full time workers at its disposal. But it was still obviously an elite party.

Nevertheless, it was the small size of the affiliated membership that caused the Socialists most concern. The total membership of the Hind Mazdoor Sabha (the Socialist sponsored trade union organisation) was stated at the Madras Conference to be as high as 7,00,000; yet the trade union affiliated membership of the Party was no more than 19,146. There was an equally depressing story with regard to peasant union

membership. The estimated strength of the Hind Kisan Panchayat was about 5,00,000 but the affiliated membership of the Party from this source was a mere 3,379. And only two youth organisations, one in U.P., the other in Andhra, had sought affiliated membership.

Why was the affiliation clause in the new constitution such a failure? This is a difficult question to answer. One possible explanation is that, in view of the opposition to the idea of affiliated membership at Patna, the rank and file did little or nothing to encourage it. There were also undoubted difficulties on the trade union front where unions operating in the government owned industries or departments were not allowed to associate themselves directly with political organisations. But even so, the affiliated membership from this source should have been much higher than the figure reported by the Joint Secretary at Madras.

Moreover, the unions which did affiliate to the Party did so by executive decisions rather than by vote of the general body of the union members concerned.[19] This was greatly regretted by the Joint Secretary, who pointed out in his report that the main purpose of the affiliation principle was to 'link up' class organisations with the Party and thus impart 'political character and direction to the day to day sectional economic struggle.[20] But this purpose could be achieved only if the affiliation clause was implemented in the way in which it was intended. It was for the general body of members of the trade unions and Kisan organisations to make the decision to affiliate rather than for the executives of those bodies. The most

19. *Report of the Eighth Conference of the Socialist Party*, Bombay, 1950, p. 154.

20. *Ibid.*

significant development for the Party at the Madras Conference was the emphasis on peaceful and democratic methods for achieving socialist objectives put by Jayaprakash Narayan in his 'Policy' report to the delegates. He was critical of those in the Party who were doubtful of the feasibility of democratic methods and declared that the policy of the party on this was 'a perfectly Marxian one; namely that:

> .....in the present conditions democratic means alone are the right means, and further that, if the democratic way of life develops and abides in India the same means would be right even at the final stage of the struggle for Socialism.[21]

From the Madras Conference onwards, the Party began to devote much thought to its prospects at the first general election. By 1951 this had become the major preoccupation of all political organisations in the country. It was not until 1952 that the Socialist Party again met in a general conference, and this was especially convened in order to discuss the ideological and organisational problems raised as a result of the political experience gained by contesting the first general election.

Relations With Other Parties

During the period under discussion, and especially on the eve of the general election, India witnessed a mushroom-like growth of political organisations. The most important of these were the Kisan Mazdoor Praja Party (K.M.P.P. or Peasants, Workers and Peoples Party) and the Jan Sangh. The political complexion of the latter was communal, organised as it was as the political wing of the militant Hindu communal body,

21 Jayaprakash Narayan, *Democratic Socialism*, Bombay, 1950. p. 13.

the Rashtriya Swayam Sevak Sangh (R.S.S.). There could be no possible common ground between the Socialists and either the R.S.S. or the Jan Sangh since both were 'reactionary' communal bodies dedicated to militant Hinduism.

But the K.M.P.P. which had been formed by dissident Congressmen under the leadership of Acharya Kripalani in June 1951 was a very different matter. We should briefly consider the circumstances which had led to the formation of this party, since the K.M.P.P. and the Socialist Party were destined in 1952 to take the important step of joining forces to form the Praja Socialist Party.

After his defeat in 1950 in the presidential election of the Congress, Acharya Kripalani, in association with a few other leading Congressmen, created the Democratic Front inside the Congress. This body was formed in September 1950 at Nasik, its main aim being to reform the Congress and its organisation from within. In this aim, Kripalani had the backing of some of the principal West Bengal and Madras leaders who, like him, felt that they had been the victims of Congress internal intrigues. But it soon became evident that Kripalani's new organisation did not carry much weight, and the prospect of bringing about any substantial reform in the Congress quickly began to fade. That body was still firmly controlled by its right wing led by Sardar Patel who, with his supporters, dominated the Central as well as many of the State Governments.

In this situation, the inability of the Democratic Front to make any significant headway was first realised by its Bengal members who decided in November 1950 to resign from the Congress with a view to forming a new party to be called the Kisan Mazdoor Praja Party. They were followed in April 1951 by other Congressmen from Andhra under the leadership of T. Prakasham. Confronted by these resignations, the

leaders of the Democratic Front met in New Delhi on May 3, 1951 and agreed to dissolve the organisation. It is interesting to note that this move was supported by Maulana Azad and by Pandit Nehru, both of whom addressed the New Delhi meeting. There upon, the assembled leaders decided to hold an all-India convention for all dissident Congressmen at Patna in June 1951 in order to consider the future course of action. But there could now be little doubt about the attitude of most of them to the Congress. Many had, in fact, already resigned, and it only remained for leaders like Acharya Kripalani to follow suit.

Meanwhile, efforts were being made by various Congressmen to call a special meeting of the A.I.C.C. in order to try to resolve the differences between the Congress and its break-away elements. But these efforts were doomed to failure, as Sardar Patel was still very much alive, and the official wing under his leadership was not prepared to make any substantial concession to the dissidents. Consequently, Kripalani announced his own resignation from the Congress on May 17, 1951 and he was followed by a score or more other Congress workers. At the Patna Convention, already referred to, which was held in June 1951, the Congress rebels decided to form a new all-India party to be called the Kisan Mazdoor Praja Party. An ad-hoc national committee was formed with Kripalani as Chairman, and including two ex-Chief Ministers, P. C. Ghosh and T. Prakasham. But even after the formation of the new Party, unsuccessful efforts were still being made, especially by Rafi Ahmad Kidwai [22] to bring the deserters back into the Congress fold.

22. R. A. Kidwai was a member of the Central cabinet and has resigned from the Congress along with Kripalani and others in 1951 after the election of P. D. Tandon as President of the Congress in 1950. Later, when Jawaharlal Nehru became Congress President Kidwai rejoined the Congress and the Central Cabinet.

From the beginning, the Socialist Party adopted a most friendly attitude towards the Congress rebels. Jayaprakash Narayan and other leaders of the Party strongly urged them to join the Socialists instead of forming a party of their own. And when the Congress dissidents from the various states met at Patna to form the K.M.P.P. Narayan attended the Convention as a special invitee and addressed the meeting. But the Socialist leader's efforts were fruitless. Even after the formation of the K.M.P.P., the Socialists still tried to come to some agreement with the new party with regard to the fighting of the general election. And a general understanding was finally reached between the two parties on election strategy and tactics, with the actual details to be left to the State branches. But owing to the difficulty of implementing this agreement at the State level, it remained to all intents and purposes a dead letter.

In considering the Socialists' relations with other parties at this time, we should also say something about the Communists who have tended to drop out of our story since Chapter III. After their fatal decision to collaborate with the British Government during theWar they had been largely eclipsed as a political force in India. But between 1948-50 they endeavoured to stage a determined come-back, pursuing a policy of 'left adventurism', the main feature of which was their attempt to overthrow the Government by violence. During this phase the main centre of their activities was the Telangana area of Hyderabad.

This policy of violence which was resorted to in most of the countries of South-East Asia at this time is supposed to have been laid down at the Calcutta Conference of Asian Youth which met in 1948. But in 1950 the Indian Communists, after causing great havoc in Telangana, abandoned their policy of 'left adventurism' and reverted to United Front tactics.

By this time the gulf between the Socialists and the Communists was as wide as it could possibly be. The Socialist response to the Communists' overtures was therefore one of unmitigated hostility. The Socialists could not forget the unpatriotic refusal of the Communists to participate in the August Movement of 1942 nor the tactics they had adopted in order to capture the Congress Socialist Party during the previous attempted United Front phase. In 1950, therefore, there could be little prospect of the two parties coming together in any sort of United Front of all left wing organisations.[23]

At this time, the policy statement of the Socialists devoted a special section to the problem of 'Leftist Unity', rejecting the whole argument of the Communists that such unity could be effectively achieved only by their inclusion. In fact, the Socialists were convinced that the very opposite was the case.[24]

23. For a detailed account of Communist-Socialist relationships during this period and later, see :
   (a) Ajoy Kumar Ghosh, *Theories and Practice of the Socialist Party*, Bombay, 1952.
   (b) R. Gupta, '*Real Face of Democratic Socialism*', Bombay, 1950.
   (c) M. R. Dandavate, *Socialist Challenge to Communists*, Bombay. 1952.
   (d) Madhu Limaye, *Communist Party—Facts and Fiction*, Hyderabad, 1951.
   (e) *Statement of Policy of the Socialist Party*, Bombay, 1947, pp. 45-46.
   (f) *Statement of Policy of the Socialist Party*, Bombay, 1951, pp. 41-42.
   (g) N. R. Masani, ' The Communist Party of India ', *Pacific Affairs*, New York, March, 1951.
   (h) Madhu Limaye, ' Indian Communism ' *Pacific Affairs*, New York, September, 1954.
24. Jayaprakash Narayan, *Political Trends*, Bombay, 1951, pp. 3-6.

The success of any movement for 'Leftist Unity' now demanded the isolation of the Communist Party from the entire left wing.

The small left wing parties were, however, unable to withstand the blandishments of the Communists in their relations with whom they always suffered from something of an inferiority complex. Although they disapproved of the Communists' policy of armed insurrection, on the grounds that the 'objective situation' in India was not ripe for it, they nevertheless insisted on the necessity of including the Communists in the United Front of Leftists which was now formed.

It was this acceptance of the Communists which was one of the main reasons why there was no agreement between these left wing parties and the Socialists either before or during the Indian general election. Only one of the left wing opposition parties, the small Bolshevik Leninist party decided to merge with the Socialists.

Attitude to Foreign Policy

Any colonial nationalist movement will tend to ignore issues of foreign policy, for all its energies have to be husbanded and concentrated on the single aim of independence. It was therefore inevitable that the Socialist Party should have been slow to appreciate the significance for India of the momentous events taking place outside its own frontiers. In this respect, it was like the Congress in which there was only a handful of individuals with a real understanding of foreign affairs. But the growing threat of war in the late 1930s, particularly the menace of fascism, forced the leaders of both the Congress and the Congress Socialist Party to think more and more about foreign policy issues, though at first their new awareness expressed itself mainly in pious resolution passed at party conferences.

Broadly speaking, throughout the Second World War the Socialists were in agreement with the stand taken by the Congress. It was only after the achievement of independence in 1947 that they felt the need for formulating a foreign policy of their own. Some thought was given to this problem at the Nasik Conference of the Party in 1948. The guiding principles were recognised to be non-alignment in the conflicts of the two power blocs, support for liberation movements in colonialc ountries, the building up of a group of countries believing in social progress and economic equality and the creation of a world organisation for the preservation of peace. These aims were to be achieved by working steadily for an effective combination of democratic socialist forces throughout the world. The resolution on foreign policy at the Nasik Conference declared that :

> .....a world government can be created only when the different peoples have achieved comparative equality of economic status. Such status cannot be achieved by peoples and parties which think in terms of preserving and improving on the old. The existing civilisation with its division of nations and men into the possessors and dispossessed, its intermittent wars, its veto powers and, above all, its inability to move on to new foundations of thought and living, is doomed. The world is anxiously waiting for a people and a government which will lead in building a new civilisation and in announcing a new message[25]...

This 'new message' was the Socialist Party's faith in Indian democratic socialism as a force making for world peace, a line

25. *Report of the Sixth Conference of the Socialist Party*, Bombay, 1948, p. 43.

of thought which was from time to time to play a significant part in determining the Socialists' attitude to particular issues in the field of foreign affairs.[26]

In order to propagate the 'new message' the Socialists saw the need for influencing both foreign governments and foreign socialists parties. But since the Party was not in power in India it would have to concentrate for the present on strengthening ties with fellow socialists abroad. The Party therefore sent representatives to gatherings of European socialists and joined the Socialist International.

Moreover in 1951, Dr. Lohia, Chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee undertook an extensive tour of all Asian countries where Socialist parties had arisen in order to explain the Indian point of view. This was considered necessary because of the growing gulf which the Indian Socialists felt, divided them from the European Socialists. The latter, by reason of their very different history, culture and social background from the Asian Socialist parties had failed to agree with the Indians over the Cold War. They had not only taken sides but had even supported colonialism. Relations between the European and Asian parties were therefore deteriorating.

It was one of the purpose of Dr. Lohia's tour of foreign countries in 1951 to explore the possibility of setting up a specific organisation of Asian Socialist Parties. As we shall see, this aim was achieved, the Asian Socialist Conference being established in 1953 at Rangoon.

This brings us to the end of our survey of the activities of the Socialist Party from the time of its separation from the Congress in 1948 to the eve of the first Indian general election. It is to the latter that we must now turn our attention.

26. For a detailed account of the Socialist thinking on Foreign affairs problems see Ram Manohar Lohia, *The Third Camp in World Affairs*, Bombay, 1950.

CHAPTER 6 THE SOCIALIST PARTY AND THE INDIAN GENERAL ELECTION. 1951-52

The General Election of 1951-52 provided the first real opportunity for all political parties in India to test their strength at the polls, since these were the first elections on a basis of adult suffrage ever to be held in the country. After a great deal of preliminary planning under the direction of the Election Commission, there was finally drawn up a mammoth register of 17,66,00,000 electors qualified to vote for the 489 seats at the Centre and 3,373 in the States. There was no dearth of candidates, 1,874 contesting seats for the Centre and 15,361 the seats in the State legislatures. The election was held amidst scenes of great enthusiasm, 51% of the registered electorate voting at the 1,32,560 polling stations.[1]

For the Socialists the General Election was an unmitigated disaster —at least in terms of seats won —as will be seen from the following tables.

House of the People[2]

Party	*No. of Candidates*	*Seats Won*	*Votes Polled*	*% of Total Votes*
Congress	479	364	4,76,65,875	45
Communist	49	16	34,84,401	3.3
Socialist	256	12	1,12,16,779	10.6
K.M.P.P.	146	9	61,56,558	5.8
Jan Sangh	93	3	32,46,288	3.1
Other Parties	327	44	1,73,95,845	16.4
Independents	524	41	1,67,78,749	15.8

1. W. Morris-Jones, *Parliament in India*, London, 1957, pp. 93-99.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 100.

State Legislatures[3]

Party	*Seats Won*	*Votes Polled*
Congress	2,293	4,39,28,995
Socialists	126	1,00,84,869
Communists	162	66,13,438
K.M.P.P.	77	53,06,219
Jan Sangh	35	28,66,566
Other Parties	345	1,47,44,173
Independents	332	2,26,20,333

The election was obviously a spectacular triumph for the Congress which won no less than 74% of the seats at the Centre and 68% of the seats in the States. Nevertheless the Congress failed to secure an absolute majority of the votes cast; it polled only 45% of the total votes for the Centre seats and 42% of the total votes cast in the States.

Though the Socialists put up over 2,000 candidates and polled more votes than any other single Party outside the Congress, they achieved a mere 12 seats in the House of the People and only 126 seats in all the State Legislatures. In contrast, the Communists who polled only one third of the Socialist vote for the House of the People secured four more seats there than the Socialists. In Madras, where the Communists polled twice as many votes as the Socialists, they secured five times as many seats.

We shall defer to a later stage in this chapter our examination of the reasons for the Socialist debacle, though without going into too much detail, since there is a growing literature on the first Indian general election which is readily available, and there is no need to reiterate at length what has already been said by

3. *Ibid.*

investigators like Morris-Jones, Venkatarangaiya, Park and Kogekar.[4] We propse to devote a good deal of this chapter to the Socialists' election manifesto about which little has hitherto been written.[5]

The Socialist's Election Platform

As Morris-Jones has said, "The Socialist Party produced the longest and best written manifesto, a piece of vigorous and colourful writing". Its general tone was set by the striking phrase that 'The locusts of despair have ravaged the harvest of freedom'[6]

After a brief review of the situation in India since independence, the manifesto, entitled *We Build for Socialism*, put the

4. The main studies of the first Indian general election are :
   (1) *The Report of the Election Commission on the First General Elections in India*, Delhi, 1955, 2 Vols.
   (2) S. V. Kogekar and Richard L. Park, *Reports on the Indian General Elections*, 1951-52, Bombay, 1956.
   (3) M. Venkatarangaiya, *The General Election in Bombay City*, Bombay, 1953.
   (4) Asoka Mehta, *The Political Mind of India*, Bombay, 1952.
   (5) W. Morris-Jones, ' The Indian Elections ', *The Political Quarterly*, July-Sept. 1952.
   (6) Richard L. Park, ' The Indian Election Results. *Far Eastern Survey*, May 1952.
   (7) S. P. Singh Sud, *Indian Elections & Legislatures*, Ludhiana, 1953.
   (8) Richard L. Park, ' Indian Democracy & the General Election,' *Pacific Affairs*, June 1952.
5. Brief summaries of the manifestos of the main parties are to be found in (a) W. Morris-Jones, ' The Indian Elections', *The Political Quarterly, July-Sept.*, 1952. (b) G. D. Binani and T. V. Rao, *India at a Glance*, Calcutta,1954, pp. 80-161.
6. W. Morris-Jones, *op. cit.*

blame on the Congress for deterioration in every walk of Indian life. It accused the Congress leaders of lack of courage in failing to bring about fundamental changes in the socio-economic structure of the country, and declared that the Congress had been 'metamorphosed into a Conservative Party'. Following up its condemnation of Congress errors of commission and omission, the manifesto proceeded to an elaborate formulation of socialist policy on the various major issues. It was claimed that the fulfilment of the Socialists' programme would :

> mean more food and more cloth, more employment; it would mean education and technical progress, better health; it will mean the institution of a peoples' functioning democracy, more self-rule and less government; it will bring light and hope to millions of homes darkened today by poverty and ignorance; it will mean a miracle of rebirth ... The peasant, the worker, the man of the middle class, the technician, the small producer, the harijan, the adivasi, the backward people—each will have a new opportunity to march forward, without the impeding burdens of the past.[7]

In view of these sweeping claims for Socialism, it is a little ironical that the General Secretary of the Party should have declared that the Socialist platform was a straightforward document, and that 'unlike the manifestos of other parties, it did not promise all things to all men.'[8]

At the same time, it would be only fair to mention the warning which the manifesto gave against people expecting too much too quickly :

7. *We Build For Socialism*, Bombay, 1951, p. 53.
8. *Report of the Pachmarhi Special Convention of the Socialist Party*, Bombay, 1952, p. 97.

> The Socialist Party desires the people to understand that no piecemeal solution of the problem is possible; and even their essential needs cannot be fulfilled unless basic structural changes are made in the social and economic organisation. We wish further to warn the people against promises of plenty without the surgery of social revolution. Let everyone understand that as long as the existing social order based on exploitation, inequality and privilege lasts, poverty cannot be banished nor that psychological climate created in which nations are made.[9]

It was on the strength of such promises and warnings that the Socialists asked the Indian people to vote for their candidates. We shall now proceed to look at the manifesto in a little more detail under the broad headings of agrarian policy, industrial policy, constitutional reform and foreign policy.

1. Agricultural Policy

In a predominantly agricultural country the Socialists were undoubtedly right inconcentrating the attention they did on this field. The manifesto insisted that a solution to the agrarian problem was impossible without a complete reorganisation of the entire agrarian economy and of village life in general. There must be long term planning involving co-ordinated schemes of reform and development as well as short term schemes, and everything should fit into an integrated prog-gramme. The section on agrarian reform was divided into the following sub-sections, dealing with ways and means of increasing food production, landownership, farming problems and the whole role of the state in the field of agriculture.

(*a*) *Land Volunteers and the Food Army* : The Party proposed

9. *We Build For Socialism*, P. 7.

to increase food production by bringing waste land under cultivation and also by raising production per acre. For this purpose, bands of land volunteers (Bhumi Sevak) were to be organised. These volunteers were to dig wells, tanks and compost pits, drain water-logged areas and construct bunds. The state was to provide them with both the training and the necessary equipment.

Secondly, the state was to organise and equip a Food Army (Anna Sena) from the landless and the poor in the villages who were to be employed in digging canals, draining marshes and in cutting down jungles. Members of the Food Army were to be the main colonisers of the land so reclaimed. The whole purpose of this scheme was that it would provide a fillip psychologically in the sense that it would arouse enthusiasm amongst youth for creative effort.

(*b*) *Land Redistribution* : After a brief criticism of the half-hearted measures of the Congress governments with regard to the abolition of *Zamindari*, in which the Congress desire to respect the rights of property was deplored, the manifesto proceeded to propose the abolition of the entire *Zamindari* system, and moreover, without compensation. Only the smaller Zamindars were to receive some sort of rehabilitation grant.

But the manifesto insisted that the mere abolition of the *Zamindari* system offered no solution to the land problem, nor was it an effective means of achieving social justice in the villages. If an incentive to production was to be given, all peasants must be guaranteed security of tenure and protection against eviction. Redistribution of land was therefore essential. It was proposed that no cultivator family should be allowed to possess 'more than three times the size of an economic holding

or roughly 30 acres of land of average productivity'.[10] Furthermore, it was stated that 'no one who does not personally participate in the cultivation of land would be allowed to possess land'.[11] All intermediaries between the tiller and the state were to be abolished, this provision being aimed at the privileges of absentee landlords.

Nevertheless, some concessions were made to 'middle' proprietors. Those who possessed more than 30 acres of land could retain up to a maximum of 100 acres 'on annuity for 10 years calculated on the basis of fair rent'.[12]

The redistribution of land thus secured was to be accompanied by consolidation of fragmented holdings and other necessary measures, all of which were aimed at securing for cultivating families an economic holding and a reasonable standard of living.

(*c*) *Co-operation* : In view of the general problem of uneconomic holdings, co-operation was to be 'the keynote of the entire village economy' under a socialist regime. It was therefore proposed to offer incentives to the peasants to establish co-operative farms on land reclaimed by the Food Army. There was also to be crop planning, co-ordinated price controls and the setting up of a co-operative shops.

(*d*) *Agricultural Labour* : Under-employment was stressed as a major evil of rural India. Emphasis was therefore placed on the need for raising double crops, wherever this was possible, and on the establishment of small industries in the countryside. Village India under socialist administration would be something more than 'just agricultural communities'. The villages should

10. *Ibid.*, p. 11.
11. *Ibid.*
12. *Ibid.*

become centres of rural industries and under decentralised control of large scale industries as well.

Efforts were also to be made to bring the income of the agricultural worker up to a National Minimum wage. The organisation of agricultural labourers was to be encouraged and their rights and interests legally protected.

Serfdom was declared incompatible with the democratic way of life, and was to be abolished and made a penal offence. Serfs were to be freed from the burden of their debts and given independent means of livelihood.

(*e*) *The Role of the State in Agriculture* : Finally, the manifesto declared that the state should undertake a much more positive role in the whole field of agriculture than had hitherto been the case. Apart from the need for legislative action on the major issues already discussed, the state should assist cultivators in many other ways. It should provide facilities for better marketing of products, for research and technical assistance and should establish co-operative banks, grain banks, and warehouses and model farms.

If the state was to play such a role, there would be a need for a fully effective system of agricultural administration. This would have to be based on what the Socialists called 'The Four Pillar State', that is to say, on the foundation of the four supports of village panchayats and regional, State and Union Land Commissions.

2. Industrial Policy

From agrarian reform the manifesto turned to consider industrial policy. Here, a sustained attack was made on the 'big business' mentality of the Congress. After a short narration of the various ways in which the Congress governments had favoured the large industrialists, the Socialists were

especially severe on the Managing Agent system, which they alleged made it possible for a handful of firms to lord it over India's industry like 'barons of old'. Such a system ruled out the possibility of the organisation of production on 'a grand scale' and the taking of those large risks without which the Indian economy could never be expanded.

Under a socialist administration industry would be organised in three main sectors—the nationalised sector, the medium scale private sector and the small scale co-operative sector.

With regard to the nationalised sector, key industries and undertakings like Iron and Steel, Textiles, Jute, Electric Power, Transport, etc., would be taken over by the state and run by regional public corporations and municipal authorities. They were to be financed by a capital levy on property over Rs.5,00,000 i.e., £40,000).

Below the nationalised sector there were to be those medium scale entrepreneurs who had shown sufficient organisational skill and willingness to take risks. The state was to provide them with additional capital needed for further development and with the technical 'know-how' necessary to enable them to produce more efficiently.

Thirdly, small scale or cottage industry was to receive the 'devoted attention of the State'. Here the indebtedness of the Socialists to Gandhism is especially interesting. They recognised that the whole success of the democratic experiment in India demanded full employment for all, and that this would be quite impossible to provide on the basis of only large scale industries. These could employ only a fraction of the total manpower available. The manifesto accordingly declared that in a country like India, 'rich in manpower and short of capital, small scale industry must occupy a place of pride'. New tools

'simple yet productive' should be devised to suit the requirements of cottage industry so that the technological level could be raised. Moreover, small scale industry was vital, not only as a means of preventing the economic dislocation that might otherwise be brought about by the nationalised sector, but as a source of aesthetic satisfaction. Only small scale manufacturers could 'satisfy the hunger for beauty and respect the sturdy independence of the human race'. Here there were echoes of the teaching not only of the Mahatma but of William Morris and Tolstoy.

With regard to the status of the worker, the manifesto declared that it was the Socialists' intention to give all workers a share in the management of industry. They were to be treated as honoured partners in a great enterprise. In the nationalised sector the worker was to have representation on workers' councils, production committees and public corporations. In the private sector, workers, participation was to be achieved by a system of shared auditing, by which one auditor was to be appointed by the management and the other by the workers themselves. In joint stock enterprises workers' participation in management was to be obligatory.

The workers also were to be actively enlisted in the actual process of economic planning. This was to be achieved by a system of decentralised planning which was to be organised from the bottom upwards. Local bodies like village panchayats, co-operatives and associations of small manufacturers, workers and handicraftsmen were to form the primary units in the system. Their schemes and ideas would be sent up to be 'scrutinised' and 'reconciled' by planning commissions at the State level which would in turn submit them for approval and action to the Union Planning Commission. The primary units

were to be responsible for the execution of such plans as were agreed upon.

Regard for the status of the worker was also reflected in the provisions of the manifesto relating to trade unionism. The right to collective bargaining and to strike were 'to remain inviolate'. The Socialists believed that workers' interests through trade union action could best be guaranteed where every worker belonged to a union. Accordingly, there should be a 'Union Shop' system under which every worker would be bound to belong to a trade union. All unions were to be autonomous with their executives responsible to their members.

With regard to trade, the manifesto proposed the creation of state trading corporations with autonomous powers subject to the over-all control of the Central government on matters of general policy. All the import and export needs of the nationaled industries were to be under the control of these corporations and provision was to be made for consumers' control by representation on these bodies.

In the field of public finance the manifesto declared that there should be a reorganisation directed towards securing increased resources for those organs of administration which were closest to the people. This was in accordance with the Socialist principle of 'functional democracy and the four pillar state' and demanded a reallocation of finances more in favour of the State Governments.

Underlying all the above mentioned proposals was the Party's desire to establish an egalitarian society. For that reason, the manifesto opposed all kinds of hereditary privileges, especially those enjoyed by the Indian princes and landlords. It was held that such privileges were anachronistic in the democratic framework of free India and should be abolished forthwith. Graduated income tax, super tax, excess profits tax, capital gains

tax and death duties were suggested as measures essential for a socialist India.

On the positive side, the state would expand social services in order to narrow the gap between rich and poor, particular attention being paid to housing and social insurance. The Socialists thought that such a policy would not only improve the economic position of the masses but would also result in the raising of their social status. Through such methods the Party hoped to achieve a minimum of Rs. 100 a month for the masses and a ceiling income of Rs. 1,000 a month for the middle classes. But it was argued that with the growth of production brought about under socialist planning both minimum and maximum incomes would necessarily rise.

3. Revision of the Constitution

The manifesto expressed the conviction that the egalitarian society which was being aimed at could never be brought about within the framework of the existing Constitution of India.[13] This was condemned as an obstacle to fundamental reforms and as failing to reflect the aspirations of the Indian people. The manifesto was highly critical of those provisions of the Constitution which safeguarded property rights and which had been put in to protect the interests of 'a microscopic minority'. It pointed to the omission of the guarantee of the right to work which would obviously be in the interests of the masses. Under Socialists rule the 'Right to Work' would be guaranteed to all.

With regard to the problem of States Reorganisation, the Party pronounced itself in favour of a redrawing of the boundaries of the States on a linguistic basis, but taking into account geographical contiguity and economic viability. Such a

13. *Ibid*, p. 43.

reorganisation would secure 'a truly democratic structure for the new Indian state'.[14]

It is also interesting to note that the Socialists proposed to amend the Constitution so to make provision for the recall. Elected legislators, it was thought, would thus be fully responsible to the sovereign people.[15]

4. Foreign Policy

The foreign policy of a Socialist government was to be based on two cardinal principles. First, the world was to be provided by India with a third alternative to the existing two power blocs. Secondly, and connected with this, Indian domestic ideals were to be projected into the field of foreign policy. The manifesto condemned the Congress foreign policy as one of oscillation from one power bloc to another rather than the fulfilment of Mr. Nehru's claim that India was following an independent policy. The Socialists branded the approach of the Nehru Government as negative and a betrayal of the hopes which the emergence of free India had aroused amongst the peoples of Asia and Africa.[16]

The manifesto attributed the cause of this failure to the feudal-cum-capitalistic structure of Indian society, 'with its extremes of poverty and wealth, its social injustices and status quoism'. A country based on such a society was incapable of playing any vital role in world affairs. Only when India could give evidence of creative energy at home and was willing to construct a new social order according to the Socialists' blueprint was India's voice likely to be listened to in the outside world.[17]

14. *Ibid.*, p. 45.
15. *Ibid.*
16. G. D. Binani and T. V. Rao, *op. cit.* p. 99.
17. *Ibid.*

The Socialists argued that it would be impossible to build a world based on the principles of equality and justice under either American or Russian leadership. 'A Russian World' ipso facto be a world ruled from Moscow 'the dictates of which must determine the pattern of life all over the globe'. On the other hand, 'an American world would have all the characteristics of a capitalist society in which a few exploit the many, and inequality and injustice rule the lives of men'.

Disliking these American and Russian pictures of the world, the Socialists endeavoured to present a third alternative. In the field of foreign policy they pledged that an Indian Socialist government would :

(*a*) abstain from involvement in the disputes between the Russian and American camps, at the same time assuring the United Nations that Socialist India would in no event assist an aggressor.

(*b*) strengthen the United Nations and its various agencies in all such efforts as might lead to a world of freedom, equality and peace.

(*c*) endeavour to work for the collective security of that region in the world which keeps out of alliances with the Atlantic and Soviet camps, in particular, the belt that stretches from Indonesia to Egypt.

(*d*) support the freedom movements of colonial peoples, in particular, those of Africa, and attempt to keep them away from alliances with either camp.

(*e*) strive for friendly relations with all peoples and governments.

(*f*) seek to revise all treaties and agreements and charters as have set up an international caste system of rich

and powerful nations on the one hand, and of weak and poor nations on the other hand, and thus establish the principle of equality of all nations.

(*g*) assist all efforts to join the human race together politically in a World Parliament and, economically, through agencies such as a World Development Corporation and World Food Pool so as to ensure that every human being, no matter what his country, is assured of a decent standard of living.

(*h*) extend its support to all Socialist movements all over the world and to all popular movements as are striving to combat hunger and war with the weapons of socialism and democracy.[18]

Such then were the main planks of the Socialists' election platform. The whole programme is of considerable interest because it reveals the attempted synthesis of their Marxism-Leninism with Gandhian and western democratic influences. In their ruthless agrarian policy based on the expropriation of the large Zamindars without compensation we see Russian influences at work, though of course the Socialists did not go to the length of advocating collective farming. In their advocacy of the nationalisation of all of India's key industries, which was combined with a firm faith in trade unionism, the Socialists were reflecting the influence of western democratic socialism. And in their insistence on the importance of cottage industries and on 'decentralisation' (even economic planning was to be decentralised) they revealed the extent to which they were under the domination of Gandhism.

18. *We Build For Socialism*, pp. 50-51.

A Comparison of the Election Manifestos of the Major Political Parties

The main features of the Party's election platform are best high-lighted by comparing them with the programmes of the other political parties. Here one is faced with the obvious difficulty of selection, for no less than 77 parties fought the elections.[19] Although very few emerged with any claim to widespread support, nevertheless some of the regional parties like the Ganatantra Parishad in Orissa, the Jharkhand, Janata and Loksevak Sangh parties in Bihar, the Peasants' and Workers' Party in Bombay and Hyderabad, and the splinter groups in Travancore-Cochin and elsewhere would demand consideration in any detailed study of the first Indian general election. But for reasons of space we shall confine ourselves only to a comparison of the programmes of the main political parties. The Election Commission, after the elections were over, gave recognition only to five parties as all India parties, the criterion being the polling of a minimum vote of 3% of the total votes cast. The parties qualifying were the Congress, the Socialist Party, the K.M.P.P., the Communist Party and the Jan Sangh. The parties thus recognised, though arbitrarily defined, do exemplify the major trends in Indian politics.

All the parties' programmes favoured some kind of planned approach to the economic problems of India, and none supported *laissez-faire*. There was general agreement with regard to the need for the abolition of the Zamindari and Jagirdari systems. Indeed, agrarian problems were stressed by all, though in varying degrees. Similarly, all were in agreement over the

19. Asoka Mehta, *The Political Mind of India*, Bombay, 1952, p. 9.

need for rapid industrialisation. The parties' attitudes to the various major issues might be briefly summarised as follows :

1. The Agrarian Programme

Though all the parties wanted to do away with landlordism and to bring about reforms in the tenancy system, they were not in agreement about the means to be adopted. The Congress and the Jan Sangh were in favour of giving compensation to the Zamindars, whilst the Socialist and the Communists were intransigeantly opposed to such compensation. The most the Socialists would agree to was that rehabilitation grants should be paid to the smaller Zamindars who would be the class most adversely affected by any abolition policy.

Similar agreement between the parties was to be found, at least in principle, over the problem of land redistribution and the landless peasant. But only the Socialists came out with a definite plan. The Communists, it is true, were in favour of land redistribution, but they did not wish to prejudice the position of the rich peasants. In this respect, the Communist position was nearer to that of the Congress and the Jan Sangh than that of the Socialists.

2. Industrial Policy

The Congress view was simply a re-affirmation of its continued faith in its traditional policy, i.e., 'basic industries should be owned or controlled by the State.'[20] Accordingly, the economy of the country was to be organised in both private and public sectors, but acceptance by the private sector of the objectives of the national plan, and any economic adjustments it demanded, was declared to be essential. The public sector

20. Binani and Rao, *op. cit.*, p. 84.

was to expand into the field of the private sector according to 'the results achieved, the resources available, and the capacity of the country at the moment.[21] In short, the Congress favoured what has generally been described as 'the mixed economy'.

The Communist Party was in favour of nationalising only foreign owned industries and elsewhere of working in co-operation with the 'national bourgeoisie'. Indian capitalists were to be assured of 'legitimate profits and protection of their interests' by the government of the 'Peoples' Democrats'.[22]

The Jan Sangh advocated state ownership of only those large industries which were concerned or connected with the production of defence materials. As for other large industries, it was opposed to any idea of bringing them under public ownership on the grounds that this had 'generally not worked efficiently and economically' in India. Indeed, the Jan Sangh went so far as to say that public ownership meant state capitalism and that 'unlimited state capitalism may also lead to totalitarianism'[23]. The party therefore pledged itself to encourage the expansion of private enterprise 'in the interests of both consumers and producers alike'. All that the Jan Sangh would concede was some degree of state interference in order to put a check on profiteering and concentration of economic power in the hands of the big few, through cartels and combinations.

Thus it will be seen that the Socialists alone advocated a policy of wholesale nationalisation of key industries.

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21. *Ibid.*
22. *Ibid.*, p. 113.
23. *Ibid.*, p. 106.

3. Cottage or Small Scale Industries

With the exception of the Communists, all the other parties were in varying degrees under the spell of the Gandhian heritage, favouring decentralisation of industry. But the Socialists went a little further than the others, their views being nearest to those of the K.M.P.P. Generally speaking, all the parties except the Communists considered the promotion of cottage industries as of vital importance for the Indian economy.

4. Industrial Relations

All the parties vied with one another in bidding for the support of the working class and the peasants and much was said about the need for safeguarding their rights and protecting their interests. Here there was a similarity between the Congress and Jan Sangh viewpoints and between those of the Socialists and the Communists. Both the Congress and the Jan Sangh were in favour of the amelioration of the conditions of the workers, but maintained that this was inseparable from production; only with a marked increase in production could there be a rise in the standard of living. The Jan Sangh expressed itself as in favour of the workers sharing 'the profits of industry based on production'.

Both parties opposed collective bargaining, strikes and lock-outs, favouring the settling of industrial disputes by arbitration and adjudication. But while the Jan Sangh declared itself in favour of the obligatory implementation of such decisions, the Congress maintained a significant silence.

In short, the two parties were in favour of giving concessions to the workers, but they did not contemplate a complete change in the employer-employee relationship based on partnership in the industrial field.

In contrast, the Socialists and the Communists put great emphasis on the workers right to collective bargaining and to strike. But the Socialist platform, which envisaged bringing the workers in as 'honoured partners' in the industrial field, differed fundamentally from that of the Communists. Largely under the growing influence of Maoism at this time, the Communists were talking of the need of a coalition of four classes—workers, peasants, national bourgeoisie and intelligentsia—as the essential basis for socialism.

5. Foreign Capital

Foreign capital was welcomed by all the parties for the development of the Indian economy, but it was to be 'without any strings attached'.

6. Taxation

All the major parties advocated some sort of progressive taxation policy with the aim of narrowing the gap between the rich and poor and providing the national exchequer with adequate resources to spend on nation building activities. But the Socialist platform was the most precise.

7. Foreign Policy

Here there were real differences in outlook between the parties. The Congress took its stand on its 'independent' foreign policy, which meant that it asked for an endorsement of 'the positive neutralism' of the Nehru government.

The Jan Sangh declared itself in favour of a foreign policy based on 'enlightened self-interest'. The speeches of its leaders suggest that it was in favour of the closest possible alliance with the Western powers, subject of course to their support for India against Pakistan.

The Communists were naturally under the influence of the

Soviet Union. They were convinced of the correctness of the Soviet Union's foreign policy and wanted India to align itself with that country. They alleged that Nehru's foreign policy was neutralist only in name, since in practice it served the interests of 'the Western imperialists'. They accused the Congress of having sided with the American 'imperialists' on most issues at UNO, including American 'aggression' in Korea.

In contrast, the Socialists, as we have seen, condemned both the American and the Russian systems and pledged themselves to the evolution of a 'third alternative'.

8. The Commonwealth

The Congress had nothing new to say on this issue and reaffirmed its faith in the usefulness of the Commonwealth connection. This, however, was a subject of much criticism by all the opposition parties, though for different reasons. The Jan Sangh, although not seeing any fundamental objection to India's links with the Commonwealth, demanded a re-examination of Indian membership in the light of the alleged partiality of the United Kingdom government for Pakistan.

The Socialists and the Communists stood for a complete severance of the Commonwealth connection. But the reasons they gave were quite different. The Communists wanted to break away because, in their opinion, the Commonwealth was the main tie which held India in close and unwelcome association with the Western imperialist powers. Since they stood for close Indian collaboration with the Soviet Union, the East European countries and China they were inevitably strongly opposed to the Commonwealth tie.

In contrast, the Socialists wanted to break away because, even though free India had refused to recognise the Crown,

there was still an element of subordination in the relationship. National aspirations for complete independence had thus remained unfulfilled.

9. Kashmir

The Kashmir problem figured prominently in the first Indian general election though less so than during the second election. To most Indians Kashmir seemed to have been considered at the United Nations in terms mainly of 'Cold War' strategy and not with a view to securing a just and peaceful settlement of the issue. There was unanimity amongst all the parties over the retention of Kashmir within the Indian Union. The Jan Sangh went so far as to claim that the issue had already been conclusively settled and to demand its withdrawal from the United Nations. The Congress, which was more alive to the complicated issues at stake at the international level, preferred to keep silence. The Socialists' stand, though not very explicit, was not so very different from that of the Congress. Support for the Kashmir National Conference and of the decisions of the proposed Constituent Assembly in the State were certainly common to both the Congress and Socialists programmes. But the Socialists were in favour of the rejection by the Government of India of U. N. mediation.

The Communists' approach to the problem was determined by international considerations relating to the Cold War. At the time of the first general election, Pakistan had not yet joined the Western camp and the Communist Party was still well disposed towards her, having originally supported the demand of the Muslim League for the creation of Pakistan (In this connection, it is significant that though the Communists during 1948-50 waged an armed struggle throughout South. East Asia, they left Pakistan alone, perhaps hoping for an

ultimate capture of power in that country). The Communists at the elections declared themselves in favour of a policy which would enable the people of Kashmir 'to decide their own destiny without interference from imperialist powers'. They were therefore in favour of the withdrawal of the Kashmir issue from UNO on the grounds that no just decision was likely to be obtained.

10. Administrative Reform

All parties supported the reorganisation of the States of the Indian Union on a linguistic basis. Otherwise, the Congress and the Jan Sangh were content, with a few minor exceptions, with the existing structure. But the Socialists and the Communists wanted a fundamental reorganisation of the whole system. All public offices were to be made elective and subject to control by the people. The Communists declared that their proposed 'Peoples' Democracy' would be based on 'local organs of power' and would mean government for the people because it would be government by the people. The Communists even suggested the abolition of the police force and the organisation of a 'peoples' militia'. The Socialists put the accent on 'decentralisation' with a view to achieving what they called 'The Four Pillar State'.

11. Education, Women and Tribal Welfare

There was not much difference in outlook between the various parties on these issues. In general, the opposition parties demanded more welfare measures whilst the Congress was content to point to its alleged achievements in these fields.

With regard to social legislation to improve the status of women in Hindu society, there was a considerable cleavage between the Jan Sangh and the other parties, the Hindu Code Bill which was before Parliament at the time being the main issue

in question. This Bill had aroused considerable opposition in the Congress party itself. The Jan Sangh and other political parties, who derived their support mainly from the Hindu masses, were strongly opposed to it. The Jan Sangh declared that social reform should not be imposed from above, but should come gradually from within Hindu society itself. The changes proposed in the Hindu Code Bill should not be brought about unless it could be proved that there was a strong popular demand for them. On the other hand, the other three parties, the Socialists, the Communists and the K.M.P.P. were unanimous in their belief in the need for radical reform and criticised the Bill because, in their opinion, it did not go far enough.

Finally, all parties were agreed on the need for free primary education, universal literacy and the promotion of the welfare of the backward and tribal communities. Only the Jan Sangh, as might have been expected, talked in terms of imparting education in the spirit of Bhartiya culture and compulsory military education.

The Election Strategy of the Socialists

We have already given, at the beginning of this chapter, the main election statistics bearing on the Socialists' failure. As already stated, though they were far behind the Congress, they polled more votes than any other single opposition party. Nevertheless, they won only 12 seats in the House of the People and 126 in the State Assemblies. In the latter, their main successes were in Bihar (23), U. P. (19), Madras, (13), Vindhya Pradesh (11), Travancore-Cochin (11), Hyderabad (11) and Bombay (9).

The main feature of the results, as far as the Socialists were concerned, was the disproportion between the total votes polled—over 11 millions for the House of the People and

10.millions for the State legislatures and the handful of seats actually won. Only in Vindhya Pradesh and Travancore-Cochin were seats won in anything like a proper proportion to votes polled.[24] What then were the main reasons for the Socialists' failure?

First, in view of their restricted party funds and their complete lack of organisation in many of the constituencies they contested, the Socialists put far too many candidates into the field. They greatly dissipated their energies by putting up no less than 256 candidates for the House of the People and 1,796 for the State Assemblies. More than half these candidates forfeited their deposits owing to their failure to poll the 8% minimum vote laid down by the Election Commission. In contrast, the Communists with far fewer candidates—they put up only 49 for the House of the People—and with a far smaller total vote than the Socialists achieved better results by concentrating on a few key areas where they had an efficient organisation.

Generally speaking, the Socialist candidates were selected by provincial units, although in principle they were selected by the constituency committees. Though there was a Central Parliamentary Board, its functions seem to have been mainly confined to issuing general directives and endorsing the candidates selected by the provincial units. It was originally laid down that a State Assembly seat should be contested only where there was a minimum party membership of 500, and a Central Parliamentary seat only where there was a constituency party membership of at least 2,500. In practice, however this ruling was disregarded. The membership figure of the Party in 1950 was a mere 1,29,447 with an additional affiliated membership of 22,525.[25] Though statistics are not available as to

24. Asoka Mehta, *op. cit.* p. 17.
25. *Report of the Eighth Conference of the Socialist Party*, Bombay, 1950, p. 154.

how this membership was distributed provincially, it is clear that the total membership was far too small to form an adequate cadre for fighting over 2,000 seats distributed all over the country. While the Congress candidates, with all the resources of the Congress political machine at their back, were able to spend lavishly, often exceeding the limit set for election expenses by the Election Commission, the Socialists only too often had the utmost difficulty even in raising sufficient for their deposits.

What is equally important, the system of single member constituencies with majority voting undoubtedly greatly favoured the Congress. This system generally works to the advantage of the better organised party or parties and tends to lead in three or four corner contests to the election of a candidate on a minority vote. This system certainly greatly favoured the Congress, as the ruling party, in both the first and second general elections. The Socialists, foreseeing the way in which the single member constituency was likely to prejudice them from the point of view of actual seats won, had earlier proposed multi-member constituencies with the cumulative vote. This proposal was naturally rejected by the Congress which, like ruling political parties in most countries, was prepared to gerrymander in its own interests. Consequently, the elections were held in the main on the basis of single member constituencies with majority voting; even where double member constituencies were created the system of majority voting was adopted.

In view of the way in which the electoral system worked to their disadvantage, the Socialists undoubtedly made a serious mistake in not concentrating their organisation on a few strong pockets. They did in fact have strong support in certain areas like Travancore-Cochin, Vindhya Pradesh, U.P. and Bihar,

and with different tactics they might have considerably improved their position in those areas.

Secondly, as the Socialists feared before the election, the opposition vote against the Congress was split between a large number of small parties. From the outset, the Socialists leaders had been aware of the strength of the Congress political machine and of the need either of mergers or of electoral alliances with other parties, if a split vote was to be avoided. After all, attempted 'United Fronts' of opposition parties have become a common feature of Asian elections. As Jayaprakash Narayan remarked:

> No unity of positive value was possible with numerous left wing parties until they dissolved their respective identities and merged with one major party. That was the aim of the Socialists Party. With differing policies and plans of action, left ranks would not be able to effect unity which alone could provide positive replacement of the present Government.[26]

The most natural allies of the Socialists would undoubtedly have been the K.M.P.P. As we have already seen, Jayaprakash Narayan made a determined effort to get the K.M.P.P. to join with the Socialists. The failure to come to an effective agreement with the K.M.P.P. was undoubtedly a severe blow to the election prospects of the Socialist leaders. The estrangement between the two parties at this time seems to have been due largely to personalities, which are always so important in Asian politics. It was also an undoubted fact that the K.M.P.P. was radical rather than socialist in outlook and was unwilling to go along with the Socialists in their forthright socialistic denunciation of the Congress which they themselves had only just left.

26. *The Hindu*, Madras, Oct. 15, 1951.

The refusal of the K.M.P.P. leaders to ally themselves with the S.P. caused great bitterness amongst the Socialist leaders. In their chagrin, some went to the length of condemning the K.M.P.P. as a party of 'disgruntled Congressmen' and 'feudal lords', a strange charge to bring against leaders for whose alliance the Socialists had been so recently angling.[27]

With regard to the other left wing groups, the Communists were the main bar to the achievement of an electoral alliance. As we have already mentioned, the Socialists' desire to bring about a united front of leftists at this time was frustrated by the fact that the smaller left wing groups wanted the Communists included and the Socialists insisted on their exclusion. The latter abhorred the very idea of any alliance in which the Communists were a partner. There was the added complication that, irrespective of possible links with the Communists, some of the left wing groups favoured Indian collaboration with the Soviet bloc, thus having an outlook on foreign affairs anathema to the Socialists. All that the Party finally achieved in the way of left wing unity was an electoral alliance with the Peasants' and Workers Party in Hyderabad which was made possible because that party in that area refused to join forces with the Communists in the United Democratic Front. An alliance made in 1950 with the Peasants' and Workers' Party in Bombay State broke down before the election because the P. & W. leaders in that State finally accepted pro-Cominform policy.[28]

The Socialists therefore were forced to look elsewhere for allies. Any understanding with the Jan Sangh, the Ram Rajya

27. The above allegations against the K.M.P.P. were made by most of the Socialists. The writer was present at an election meeting in Banaras in February 1952 where Jayaprakash Narayan made similar charges against the K.M.P.P.

28. *Report of the Pachmarhi Special Convention of the Socialist Party*, p. 99.

Parishad or Hindu Mahasabha was of course out of the question because these were communal parties quite opposed to the whole concept of secular democracy. In the end the Socialists teamed up with the Scheduled Castes Federation (S. C. F.) and the Jharkhand party of Bihar.

The alliance with the S. C. F. was undoubtedly a mistake. In the first place it yielded few practical results. It failed to work effectively with the solitary exception of Bombay City, where the General Secretary of the Socialist Party and the President of the S. C. F. were candidates for the general and reserved seats. In the Maharashtra region of Bombay State and in Hyderabad the two parties actually worked against each other.

Much more serious was the legitimate charge of opportunism brought against the Socialists for making an electoral agreement with a party with aims so different from their own. Nehru, for instance stigmatised the alliance as opportunism and deviation from socialist principles. The alliance with the S. C. F. (and with the Jharkhand party) also came in for severe criticism within the party. Much dissatisfaction was voiced at the Pachmarhi Conference of the Socialists on this score. Shiva Ram Shastri, for instance, maintained that in his state of Hyderabad the electoral alliance with the S.C.F. had been a liability rather than an asset.[29] And Keshav Gore of Maharashtra pointed to Dr. Ambedkar's anti-socialist speeches during the campaign.[30] Underlying all the criticism of the alliance was socialist antipathy to the whole past political record of the S. C. F's leader, Dr. Ambedkar. There was the feeling that the S. C. F., by approving of British imperialism in the colonial period, had betrayed the national cause.

Both Asoka Mehta, the General Secretary and Jayaprakash

29. *Ibid.*, p. 8
30. *Ibid.*, p. 9

Narayan put forward some extremely dubious arguments in order to justify the electoral alliance with the S. C. F. Asoka Mehta, for instance, argued that it had always been one of the aims of the Socialists to come to an understanding with the S. C. F. and that it was purely fortuitous that it should have finally come about at the time of the elections :

> We have repeatedly made it clear that the S. P. has been interested for a long time in a closer understanding and possible integration with the Scheduled Castes and Tribes— That such an understanding, both with the S. C. F. and the Adivasi Mahasabha, could be reached only on the eve of the election in an accident. I repeat that it is not a mere election agreement. The socialist movement in India must draw to it the support of the submerged section of the people. . .[31]

It is doubtful if many were convinced by these arguments. Nor was the S. C. F. eventually merged in the Socialist Party.

Thus the second cause of the failure of the Socialists was their inability to come to an electoral agreement with those left wing parties with which they had much in common, and their resort to unnatural and largely unworkable alliances with parties with whom they had every little in common. The net result was a split opposition vote which worked greatly to the advantage of the Congress.

After the elections the Socialists admitted they had underestimated the general effect of a proliferation of small parties. As the General Secretary, Asoka Mehta, remarked :

> We were led to believe that in the absence of any serious opposition apart from the Socialists, the discontented would inevitably rally around us. We failed to realise that the prospect of a big opposition vote and the absence of a well

31. *The Hindu*, Nov. 29, 1951.

organised alternative to the Congress was bound to invite groups and parties to get formed and try their luck at the polls.[32]

The third reason for the failure of the Party to win seats was its lack of roots in the countryside. In many places the Party organisation rarely went below the district or teshsil levels. This of course was due to some extent to its youthfulness as a Party. After all, from its birth in 1934 until it broke with the Congress in 1948 it had been no more than a pressure group inside the Congress. It had had only three years within wich to try to put down roots in rural India, a supremely difficult task in view of its lack of funds. But there were other reasons for the failure to win more peasant votes.

In the first place, despite all they had said in the past about the need for appealing to the masses, the Party had remained very much a small political elite with a highly theoretical approach to politics. As Morris-Jones had said, though their policy statement was admirable in many respects, if it 'had been presented more popularly' they might have won more votes. As it was, they greatly under-estimated the role of caste, family and those other aspects of traditional India which count for so much in the villages. For instance, Party workers in the villages were undoubtedly in a weak position on account of their youth and their consequent inability to sway illiterate peasants accustomed to accord respect only to local notables of ripe years and social influence. As the General Secretary of the Party commented :

> .....the hard work done by young people in canvassing support was often lost in a night by the shrewd counter efforts put in by elder men of established social position.[33]

The same point was made by a group of observers of the election in Bombay State :

32. *Report of the Pachmarhi Special Convention of the Socialist Party*, p. 97.
33. *Ibid.*, p. 106.

> .....the defect here was that most of the Party's workers were young and inexperienced. 'They were mere lads and schoolboys', as one of the leaders put it. Their words therefore could not carry the same weight as those of the Congress workers who were, on the whole, older and more experienced. This also affected the efforts made on the day of election to bring their supporters to the polling stations.[34]

Fourthly, there was the undoubted fact that an influential section of the Party remained unconvinced that the socialism they aimed to establish in India could be achieved by parliamentary methods. True to their Marxism-Leninism, they still regarded parliamentary institutions as 'reformist'. As we have seen, this outlook was brought out very significantly in the heated discussions which had taken place at the Patna Conference in 1949. It was too much to expect a major transformation to take place in the space of the mere two years between Patna and the elections. That this belief was still strong is illustrated by the fact that prominent leaders like Jayaprakash Narayan and Dr. Lohia refrained from standing as parliamentary candidates.

Fifthly and finally, it might possibly be argued that Mr. Nehru's socialism and his use of socialist language as leader of the Congress combined with his own immense prestige to play some part in cutting the ground from under the feet of the Socialists. But this should not be over-estimated since at this time the Congress could scarcely be said to be committed to a

34. S. V. Kogekar and Richard L. Park, *Reports on the Indian General Elections,* Bombay, 1956, p. 67.
The writer himself encountered similar experiences while canvassing for support for Socialist candidates in U. P. and Bihar during the elections.

thorough-going socialist programme. It was not until the second Indian general election, following on the Avadi resolution with its emphasis on the achievement of 'a socialist pattern of society' that the Socialists were to have much of their thunder stolen by the Congress.

One of the main results of the elections on public opinion in India, quite apart from the justifiable shock they caused to the Socialists themselves, was the feeling that it was the Communists rather than the Socialists who were now most likely to prove the alternative government to the Congress. They had won no less than 62 seats in the Madras legislature, an achievement unequalled by any other opposition party. It was this alarming polarisation of political opinion between the Congress and the Communists that was one of the main reasons for the merger between the Socialists and the K. M. P. P. which we shall discuss in the next chapter. There was now a natural feeling among the left wing parties that if they did not hang together then they were very likely to hang separately.

CHAPTER 7 THE PRAJA SOCIALIST PARTY 1952-55

The period from 1952-55 which we are now about to consider was one of more than usual dissension for the Socialists. Their complete inability to organise a cohesive party was now revealed in full measure. Though the Socialist Party in 1952 achieved a merger with the K. M. P. P. to form the Praja Socialist Party, that organisation was no sooner formed than it was wracked by fundamental divisions, resignations and splits caused by the anarchical lack of discipline evinced by leaders and rank and file alike. The root problem was still the 'divided mind' of the Socialists. How were they to reconcile Marxism-Leninism, Gandhism and Social Democracy ? Most of the leaders remained acutely ambivalent. Though Marxist-Leninist by training, they were now the bitter foes of the Communists, but many still could not bring themselves to believe in the efficacy of parliamentary government as a means of establishing socialism in India. Equally, though the Congress Socialist Party had originally been formed because of the Socialists lack of faith in the Gandhian techniques, there were leaders who still could not withstand the spell cast by the Gandhian heritage.

The divided mind of the Socialists is well illustrated by the behaviour of the leaders during this period. Jayaprakash Narayan, the former Communist, fell more and more under the influence of Vinoba Bhave's neo-Gandhism, giving up active politics and devoting most of his time to Bhoodan constructive work at the Sarvodaya Ashram founded by him at Shekhodeora in the

Gaya district of Bihar.[1] Dr. Lohia who had always been a recognised Gandhian in the party, evolved the doctrine of 'equidistance', which meant that the Praja Socialist Party should take up a position chosen with geometrical exactitude between the Congress and Communist Parties.[2] Asoka Mehta, the Party leader best disposed towards parliamentary democracy searched for what he called 'areas of agreement' with the Congress whilst at the same time revealing much scepticism about parliamentary government itself. The net result of much tedious theorising and ideological confusion was complete chaos.

The results of the first general election, as we have seen, came as a great shock to the Socialist leaders as well as to the rank and file members. The unexpected success of the Communists in terms of seats won and the trend towards the polarisation of Indian politics between the Congress and the Communists revealed in full measure the extent to which the democratic left wing was divided. What was to be the strategy of the Socialists in the new situation that confronted them ?

The election had emphasised the Party's lack of organisation as compared with that of the Congress and the Communists. The following comment might be taken as a fair appraisal of the Party's organisation two years after the elections :

> Political organisations are...costly in large, undeveloped countries, and Indian Socialists, like all their Asian comrades, are desperately poor; only Communism seems to attract rich progressives. The Socialist Party's annual income is Rs. 300,000 of which only half reaches the central offices.

1. *The Statesman Overseas Weekly*, Calcutta, Oct. 10, 1954.
2. *The Times*, London, Nov. 25, 1955.

> Until recently, paid workers were offered a string bed at head-quarters and Rs. 50 a month. Now they are offered a string bed.
>
> The consequences of poverty are apparent; it is difficult to keep in touch with state committees more than 1,000 miles away, and electioneering is seriously curtailed. During a recent election campaign the Socialists had only one worker in each district, while the Communists were able to organise and pay for columns of 1,000 cyclists who greatly impressed the peasants. In India strength attracts strength.[3]

It was in a atmosphere of disillusion that the Socialists met at Pachmarhi in 1952 to take stock of their position and their future prospects. From the discussions held two conclusions might be drawn. First, the leaders were still intent on the almost impossible task of clarifying their ideology. Secondly, all were agreed on the urgent immediate need of consolidating the democratic and progressive opposition forces to both the Congress and the Communists.

Dr. Lohia in his presidential address to the Conference endeavoured to give a new formulation to the ideological basis of the Party. He took his stand on 'the equidistance theory' between the Communists and the Congress. The Socialists, antagonism to the Communists should not lead them to accentuate the present polarisation of politics by seeking areas of agreement with the Congress which remained essentially a capitalist organisation. The Socialists should take up a stand as champions of 'small scale technology', which, as we have seen, had been an important plank in the Party's election programme and which derived to a considerable extent from Gandhism. Dr. Lohia also rejected the use of violence as a means of achieving

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3. *Ibid.*

a socialist order. In this and in his insistence on the inseparable relation between ends and means he revealed himself a true Gandhian.

Jayaprakash Narayan in his speech at Pachmarhi, suggested that the aim of the Party should be not only to consolidate behind it all the democratic left wing forces but throw open its doors to all groups and individuals accepting its objectives.[4] And here he made a pointed reference to the Scheduled Caste Federation, the Jharkhand Party and the K. M. P. P. As a result of Narayan's persuasiveness the Party adopted a new political line at Pachmarhi which was based on acceptance of his arguements. Every effort was to be made to bring like-minded groups and individuals into the Party.[5]

Despite the hard things that had been said at the time of the election, the K. M. P. P. was obviously the group most likely to come to an agreement with the Socialists. Indeed, renewed efforts to bring about a union had already been made at a meeting of leaders at Banaras soon after the elections. There the possibility of forming a united parliamentary front between the S. P. and the K. M. P. P. had been discussed, as also a merger between the Socialists and the Revolutionary Socialist Party. Though the latter move failed, the proposal to form a united parliamentary opposition between the S. P. and the K. M. P. P bore fruit. On June 1, 1952, the Socialist-Praja group was formed, with Mrs. Sucheta Kripalani as leader, of a parliamentary alliance based on adherence to a 'minimum programme'. Both parties agreed on the need for (1) an egalitarian social order, (2) the decentralisation of political power, (3) land redistribution,

4. *Report of the Pachmarhi Special Convention of the Socialist Party*, Bombay 1952, p. 64.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 80.

(4) the decentralisation of industry, (5) the nationalisation of key industries, (6) free trade unionism, (7) maintenance of civil liberties, (8) austerity, in conformity with the spirit of swadeshi, (9) a policy of neutrality and non-involvement in power blocs in foreign affairs, (10) reduction in the armed forces and the building of a national militia.[6]

This agreement was to be the prelude to the eventual merger of the two parties. And it was certainly a considerable achievement coming so soon after the disagreement between the two parties over the fighting of the elections. In a joint statement issued on this occasion, Kripalani and Asoka Mehta made it clear that the agreement would in all probability be followed by a merger. They declared that :

> .....the representatives of the two parties were of the opinion that every effort should be made to bring about a merger of the two parties and that any steps leading in that direction were to be welcomed.[7]

But there were obviously likely to be complications, since in Madras the K. M. P. P. had already entered into commitments with the Communists in an endeavour to form an anti-Congress government.

The Lucknow Agreement

The decision in favour of a complete merger of the two parties followed hard on the heels of the parliamentary agreement. At a meeting held at Lucknow on August 24-25, 1952, between Acharya Kripalani on behalf of the K. M. P. P. and Acharya Narendra Deva, Dr. Lohia and Asoka Mehta on behalf of the Socialist Party, it was agreed to merge the two parties in order

6. *The Merger : How and Why*, Bombay, 1952, pp. 33-34.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 35.

to form the Praja Socialist Party. The programme which had already been agreed upon for the joint working of the two parties as a parliamentary opposition was accepted as the basis of the P. S. P. The leaders agreed to hold a meeting of representatives of the S. P. and the K. M. P. P. at Bombay in the following month in order to finalise the merger agreement. And it was also decided that the constitution of the S. P. should be adopted by the P. S. P. until a general conference could be called.[8]

There was much jubilation at the birth of the Praja Socialist Party. Acharya Narendra Deva hailed the agreement as the first big step towards a consolidation of non-communal and non-communist groups.[9] Asoka Mehta excitedly acclaimed the new Party as 'the new core of the nation's will for a new life' and hoped that the P. S. P. would become a 'massive alternative' to Congress rule. He maintained that the formation of the P. S. P. was 'a fundamental turning point', since it marked the end of the disastrous process of political fragmentation which had been so pronounced a feature of the years since the achievement of independence.[10] The coming together of the S. P. and the K. M. P. P. was not inspired by political opportunism nor was it a casual decision :

> For almost three months every aspect of objective policy and programme of the two parties was reviewed and an integrated common understanding has evolved. The understanding combines and carries forward the best in our national and socialist movements.....[11]

Asoka Mehta hoped that the merger would provide the

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8. *Ibid.*, pp. 36-38.
9. *The Statesman Overseas Weeky,* Calcutta, August 30, 1952.
10. 'The Momentous Merger', *Janata,* August 31, 1952.
11. *The Hindu,* Madras, August 28, 1952.

basis for the further consolidation of like-minded parties and groups.

The Problem of the U. D. F. in Madras

It seems to have been the opinion of the leaders that the agreement reached at Lucknow to form the P. S. P. out of the S.P. and the K. M. P. P. was a sufficient reason for the merger to take place. There was little inclination to refer this crucial decision to the party membership for approval. As we shall see, this failure on the part of the leaders came in for much criticism later. But the immediate problem the leaders had to face was how to reconcile their conflicting attitudes to the United Democratic Front (U. D. F.) in Madras. The U. D. F. was formed in 1951 under the leadership of T. Prakasham, an ex-Chief Minister of Madras, as a joint front of all opposition parties except the Socialists to defeat the Congress at the general election. The Socialists had refused to participate because of the inclusion of the Communists.

At the elections, the Congress had fared badly in Madras securing only 152 seats in an Assembly of 375. The rest of the seats had been won by the Communists (62), the K. M. P. P. (35), Others (51), Independents (62) and Socialists (13). Madras was of particular importance to the K. M. P. P. because it scored its major election success in that State. Moreover, not only was it allied with the Communists in the U. D. F. but its leaders held important offices in it. On the other hand, the Socialists with their uncompromising policy of refusing to join any 'front' which included the Communists, regarded the U. D. F. as pernicious and wanted to see it break up. Asoka Mehta expressed the general S. P. view of the U. D. F. thus :

> The U. D. F. in the prevailing circumstances, is an unnatural combination. Its break up will further the political

education of the people of Madras... It is to the advantage of the Congress and Communists alone that the unnatural U.D.F. that smothers political clarity and education should continue. All democrats and radicals must work for its break up.[12]

Jayaprakash Narayan, in a press interview, expressed similar view when he said that the continuation of the K. M. P. P—Communist alliance in Madras would create 'a fantastic situation'. Everywhere in India the Socialists were opposing the Communist Party. How then could one of their wings in the Madras legislature co-operate with the Communists ? He declared himself to be resolutely opposed to 'such a make-shift policy'.[13]

Although the K. M. P. P. members of the Madras legislature were opposed to the idea of a break with the U.D.F. and were of the opinion that the newly formed P. S. P. should be closely allied with the U.D.F., a compromise was ultimately achieved between the K. M. P. P. and S. P. leaders. It was agreed that the K. M. P. P. section of the P. S. P. in the Madras legislature should continue to be part of the U.D.F., but that the Socialist section of the P. S. P. should function as a distinct group under the separate leadership of Dr. K. B. Menon. Any new addition to the Party's strength in either of the two Madras legislatures was to join Dr. Menon's P. S. P. group, and both groups were to function as a united party outside the legislatures. At the same time, private assurances were given by the K. M. P. P. leaders that they would terminate their agreement to work with the Communists at the first suitable opportunity. These promises were fulfilled, following on the formation of the Praja Socialist Party.

12. *The Hindu*, September, 9, 1952.
13. *Ibid.*

Socialist Criticism of the Merger

Any account of the merger of the S. P. and the K. M. P. P. to form the P. S. P. would be incomplete unless we consider the arguments of those who were hostile to fusion. Most of the vocal critics were Socialists who disagreed on ideological grounds, whilst the K. M. P. P. dissenters objected largely for personal reasons.

The criticism of certain members of the S. P. raised issues of fundamental importance. Broadly Marxist in outlook, this group was made up of ex-Trotskyites from West Bengal and Tamilnad and individual Marxist intellectuals like Professor Mukut Behari Lal of U. P. At meetings of the General Council of the P. S. P., Professor Lal is reported to have condemned the merger as 'a betrayal of socialism'. He held that it had been achieved only at the price of sacrificing the Marxist principles of the Party to the Gandhism of the K. M. P. P. As there was a complete absence of ideological unity between the S. P. and the K. M. P. P., the merger was quite 'unprincipled.' Recalling the circumstances in which the Congress Socialist Party had been founded as 'a challenge to Gandhism' and as an instrument for achieving a socialist society, Professor Lal declared that the merger was quite incompatible with the basic, i. e. Marxist, programme of the Party.[14]. Broadly similar criticism was voiced by Mrs. Shelia Pereira, who contended that by accepting the merger with the K. M. P. P. the Socialists were subordinating their own ideals to those of an essentially 'reactionary' organisation.

Some of the critics went so far as to organise a meeting at Bombay at the time of the meeting of the General Council of the P. S. P. in order to condemn the merger decision as unconsti-

14. *The Hindu*, September 26, 1952.
See also *Manchester Guardian*, September 29, 1952.

tutional. They declared that only the National Conference of the Party had constitutional authority to settle matters of such fundamental importance. A group of Socialists from Bengal was equally hostile to the merger decision as undemocratic :

> We are of the considered opinion that the leaders of the Socialist Party, in deciding to dissolve the party and merge it completely with another party to form a new party without taking into account the opinion of its members or evenof the provincial executives, have been most undemocratic, and as such, their decision has little value for us.[15]

The Communists were only too delighted to seize on this criticism as evidence of the reactionary character of both the S. P. and the K. M. P. P. leaders. Ajoya Kumar Ghosh, general secretary of the Communist Party observed that :

> It is remarkable that the leaders of the Socialist Party and the K. M. P. P. who talk so much about democracy have decided upon such a serious step without the democratic decision of their own ranks. We have no doubt that the members of the two parties realise that the kind of merger that has been agreed upon by the leadership is a great disservice to the cause of democracy and to our people battling against reaction.[16]

But the general secretary of the C. P. had not been suddenly converted to a belief in democratic practices and techniques. He was striking back against the Socialists because they alone amongst the major left wing groups had tried to set an example by refusing to join any 'front' to which the Communist belonged. The Communist technique was such that if the P. S. P. leaders had decided without consultation with the rank and file to co-operate with the Communists, the latter would have hailed

15. *The Statesman Overseas Weekly*, Calcutta, October 4, 1952.
16. *The Hindu*, Madras, August 28, 1952.

such a step as a signal triumph for the democratic and progressive forces.

Yet was there not some truth in the charge that the merger had been imposed by the leaders in an essentially undemocratic way ? The major problem was that the existing constitution of the S. P., as approved at the Madras National Conference of 1950, had not envisaged the need for providing for such an extraordinary situation as the dissolution of the Party with a view to its merger with another. As the rules stood, the taking of such a step was within the competence neither of the General Council nor the National Conference.[17]

A referendum would have been the most democratic method of discovering the views of the rank and file of the Party on the merger question. And failing a referendum there were other alternatives such as the referring of the matter to a meeting of District or Provincial Councils or even to a special convention of the Party. The last mentioned course would probably have been the wisest as the best guarantee of a perfectly constitutional decision.

Since the leaders of the S. P. did not choose to resort to any of these methods of consultation, it might well be argued that the decision to merge with the K. M. P. P. lacked the formal approval of the rank and file. But as the decision to create the Praja Socialist Party was accepted by the bulk of the members without demur, it might equally be argued that the leaders acted as they did because they knew they would be supported by the Party as a whole. The mood of the Party after the general election was certainly favourable to drastic reform, so that the calling of a special convention to approve of the merger would not have led to any different ecision.

17. See *Articles VII & VIII of the Constitution of the Socialist Party*, Bombay, 1950.

All we can say is that there is no convincing explanation as to why the Socialist leaders failed to consult the rank and file over the decision to create the Praja Socialist Party. There had been previous instances when the party members had been asked to swallow bitter pills in the form of policy changes when asked to by the leadership, and there is no reason to believe that another demand on this occasion would have failed to win support. Nevertheless, for the united leadership to confront the Party with a *fait accompli*, as it did over the merger, was to set a dangerous precedent in that it exposed the Party leaders to the charge of being undemocratic, a criticism which as we have seen the Communists were quick to seize upon.

What of the charge of the Socialist Party critics that the merger with the K. M. P. P. brought about a union of incompatibles ? A good enough case could be made out to combat this criticism. In the first place, both parties had a common parentage, their leaders having shared similar experiences during the period of national struggle. And most of the members of both parties had ultimately left the Congress for broadly similar reasons, i. e. their dissatisfaction with the socio-economic policies of the Congress governments.

Moreover, a comparison of the actual programmes of the two parties showed a by no means inconsiderable area of agreement on economic, social and administrative questions.[18] Both stood for sweeping socio-economic changes in Indian society, though the K. M. P. P. was less extreme in outlook than the Socialists and motivated by radicalism rather than by doctrinaire Marxism. But the K. M. P. P. had accepted the need for the nationalisation of key industries. And though its Gandhism was objected to by the Socialist critics, some members of the K. M.

18. *The Merger : How & Why*, Bombay, 1952, pp. 40-45.

P. P. had come to realise that the Gandhian concept of Trusteeship did not make much sense in the context of modern India.

Similarly, the Gandhian element in the Socialist Party brought it close to the K. M. P. P. The Socialists in the post-independence period had discarded violence, in practice at any rate, as a method of capturing power; they subscribed to a policy of decentralisation both in the industrial and political fields; and they had come to accept, under the influence of leaders like Dr. Lohia, the maxim that ends and means are inseparable. Such a Gandhian outlook obviously brought the Party close to the K. M. P. P.

Yet to try to argue, as did some of the P. S. P. spokesmen at this time, that there were no differences in outlook between the two component units of the new Party would be a misrepresentation of the facts. Their *prevailing* ideologies certainly differed from each other. The Socialists believed in Marxism and professed to be able to adapt it to Indian conditions. The K. M. P. P. leaders held no such views. And though the S. P. had accepted the validity of the Gandhian technique for certain purposes, one has only to look at the reports of the Party conferences to see how much Marx and Engels were quoted in the cut and thrust of party debate. It is true that some of the leaders of the Socialists had never accepted Marxism as their philosophy. But that could scarcely be construed as an argument in support of the non-Marxian character of the Party.

Neither the Lucknow Agreement nor the subsequent statements of the leaders of the two parties gave any indication of what was to be the ideological basis of the Praja Socialist Party. In our opinion, the new party was simply a working agreement over practical aims and objective. As Acharya Narendra Deva's reply to Mrs. Sheila Pereira suggested, the Socialists never conisdered they had compromised their own political principles b

joining with the K. M. P. P.[19] As we have seen, the merger was, on the whole, acceptable to the rank and file. There were minor dissensions here and there, and most of the Socialists felt a little uncomfortable about certain aspects of the alliance.[20] But those who wanted to continue to be active in politics had no choice but to accept the merger as an established fact.

How far did the merger serve as a rallying point for a further consolidation of the progressive democratic opposition ? It must be confessed that the results achieved were disappointing. Some of the leaders of the other left wing parties certainly welcomed the birth of the new party, but they hesitated to throw in their lot with it. Their reluctance to follow the example of the K. M. P. P. and merge with the P. S. P. was possibly due to their fear of losing their individuality in a larger political organisation with a galaxy of national leaders like Jayaprakash Narayan, Acharya Narendra Deva and Acharya Kripalani. Anyway, only the Subhasist wing of the Forward Bloc actually joined the P. S. P.

But the new Party scored one immediate success. It played a considerable part in the formation of the Asian Socialist Conference at Rangoon. As we have already seen, Dr. Lohia, the Chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the Socialist Party, had prepared the ground for the A. S. C. by his tour of Asian countries in 1950 with a view to exploring the possibility of forming an association of like-mined Asian socialist parties. These efforts were crowned with success with the formation

19. *The Hindu*, Madras, Sept. 26, 1952.
See also *Manchester Guardian*, Sept. 29, 1952.
Acharya Narendra Deva expressed similar views to a group of Young Socialists at Banaras, which included the writer, when asked to explain the indeological basis of the P. S. P. in Oct. 1952.
20. Nyron Weiner, *Party Politics in India*, p. 116.

of the Asian Socialist Conference at Rangoon in 1953, the conveners being the Praja Socialist Party, the Mapai (Israel), the Burmese Socilalist Party and the Partai Socialist, Indonesia.[21]

The Nehru-Narayan Talks

The Praja Socialist Party was dogged by dissension and fundamental cleavages almost from the day of its birth. In fact its whole history has been one of almost perpetual crisis. Acute internal differences first arose over the Nehru-Narayan talks.

In February 1953 the Prime Minister invited Jayaprakash Narayan to discuss with him ways and means of achieving co-operation between the Congress and the P. S. P. both at governmental and popular levels. These talks ended in failure, allegedly because of the rejection of a Fourteen Point programme[22] put up by Narayan as a basis for the co-operation sought by the Prime Minister. But in our opinion, the hands of the two leaders were tied because of the weight of opposition in their respective parties. The pronounced antagonism to the move inside the Congress was largely beneath the surface, owing to the dominant position and authority of Mr. Nehru. But in the P.S. P. a full scale verbal battle was launched the consequences of which

21. A detailed account of the Asian Socialist Conference can be found in

(a) *Report of the Asian Socialist Conference,* Rangoon, 1953.

(b) S. Rose, 'The Asian Socialist Conference of 1953', *St.Antony's Papers,* London, 1957.

(c) M. N. Roy, 'Rangoon & After', *Pacific Affairs,* June, 1953.

(d) Rubinstein, 'The Rangoon Conference', *Ibid.*

(e) *Two years of the Asian Socialist Conference,* Bombay, 1956.

See also, G. S. Bhargava, 'Positive Aspects of Asian socialism', *Pacific Affairs,* Sept. 1953.

22. *Nehru-Jayaprakash Talks.* Bombay, 1953, pp. 14-16.

have continued in various forms ever since to have an important influence on the thought and action of the Socialists.

The P. S. P. was divided from top to bottom over the Nehru-Narayan talks and a special convention of the Party had to be called to discuss the problem. This met at Betul from June 14th to 18th, 1953. The general secretary, Asoka Mehta, considered in his report the theoretical aspects of co-operation with the Congress. He argued that the reconstruction of India was possible only by adherence to the principles of 'national integrity, democratic freedom and social change'. Whether as a government party or in opposition, all 'patriotic forces' should strive to co-operate for purposes of national reconstruction. There was more similarity of outlook on the principles of national integrity and democratic freedom between the Congress and the Praja Socialist Party than there was between the latter and 'the forces arrayed in opposition to the Government'. Thus the main justification for the initiation of the talks between Nehru and Narayan was this unity of thought. And although the talks had ended in failure owing to 'divergence in policies on social change' the economic backwardness of the country exerted certain 'inescapable compulsions' on the P. S. P. as an opposition party :

> The backward economy has caused social stagnation; caste, communal and regional considerations and loyalities receive disproportionate support. As the problems of economic development are difficult of comprehension and execution, discontent as well as opposition tend to flow in channels of traditional allegiances.
>
> The Socialist Movement can not only have nothing to do with such narrow and sectarian efforts, but it is organised to counter them. Its policies have to be in terms of social

reform and social change and development. That development in an under-developed country, depends on the acceptance of equality, austerity and hard work.

The strain involved in such policies is considerable and opposition based upon such policies has to strive hard to prevent sliding into attitudes and actions that run counter to basic needs (Economic development, for example, demands higher taxation. An opposition party tends to oppose it unless it is confined to the top few). Backward economy imposes strains in development, and an opposition party, to build itself up, decries and resists the strain. Demand for swifter development, if it means added strain, rarely helps to build up an alternative focus of power. The result of the dilemma is that politics becomes somewhat unreal and an all round reluctance to embark upon bold policies emerges.[23]

Asoka Mehta went on to say that the Congress party, owing to its fear of opposition and 'lack of understanding and purpose', was unwilling to pursue a bold policy in the fields of taxation and economic development. At the same time, the P. S. P. 'notwithstanding its understanding and initiative finds itself in no better position'[24]. In such a situation, politics reached a point where, until structural changes were made from the centre, 'activities at the periphery become unreal.'[25]

According to Asoka Mehta, neither Communism nor Communalism nor even parliamentary government afforded any hope of a solution to the problem of how to achieve democratic social

23. *Report of the Special Convention of the Praja Socialist Party*, Bombay 1953, p. 168.
24. *Ibid.*
25. *Ibid.*

change. In a country like India all the compulsions of the backward economy 'tended to push towards totalitarianism or timidity'.[26] A real solution could be sought only by widening the base of the government by confining the opposition to the fringes, and by strengthening the forces of pluralism both in authority and initiative. The latter objective could best be achieved by compulsory village co-operatives and by union shop trade unions where authority and initiative were widely shared and where rights were interwoven with responsibilities.[27] Such mass organisations would invoke greater popular enthusiasm and foster greater initiative for reconstruction than purely political bodies.

Asoka Mehta concluded his argument on the 'compulsions of the backward economy' by observing that in India there was a grave danger of democratic and secular policies being discredited because of the failure of the Congress party as a political organisation. To avoid such a danger there should be either an agreement on programmes between the democratic parties or a delimitation of 'areas of agreement' and disagreement between them.[28]

This plea put forward by Asoka Mehta at the Betul convention for some sort of understanding with the Congress immediately aroused acute opposition in the P. S. P. This was inevitable since for years the Socialists had come to believe that they had as little in common with the Congress as they had with the Communists. Indeed the whole structure and ideology of the Party

26. *Ibid.* p. 169.
27. *Ibid.* p. 168
28. *Ibid.*, p. 170.
For a detailed account of Asoka Mehat's views on the problem see his brochure *Politics of Planned Economy,* Bombay, 1953.

had been built on this belief in the years since independence. The underlying idea behind the formation of the P. S. P. had been that the new organisation would provide an effective democratic socialist alternative to the conservative minded Congress and the totalitarian Communists. How could the P. S. P. now come to an agreement with the Congress, a party which Jayaprakash Narayan as recently as the Pachmarhi convention had condemned, in the language of Dr. Lohia, as 'a party of famine, corruption and disguised capitalism' ?[29]

Thus the strategy advocated by Asoka Mehta at the special Betul Convention in 1953 struck at the very root of the Praja Socialist Party as an independent organisation. In our opinion, it was the feeling that Asoka Mehta had inadvertently undermined the independent position of the P. S. P. that was primarily responsible for the widespread opposition to the Nehru-Narayan talks which was such a marked feature of the discussions at the Betul Convention.

Among the national leaders of the Party, Acharya Narendra Deva and Dr. Lohia were both opposed to the idea of any cooperation with the Congress. The former expressed his criticism only in the National Executive, but Dr. Lohia was much more vocal and came to be regarded as the leader of all those who were opposed to what came to be known as Asoka Mehta's thesis on 'the compulsions of a backward economy'. We ought therefore to consider Dr. Lohia's arguments and also some of those who held similar views.

Dr. Lohia was of the opinion that the whole issue of conflict between national and party interest—the central agrument of Mehta's thesis—was unreal unless one regarded a political party as simply an organisation of 'power-seekers'. A party arose

29. *Report of the Special Convention of the Socialist Party*, 1952, p. 66.

'when the existing ways have lost their value and a new way become necessary'.[30] The implication was that the Congress and the P. S. P. stood for quite different socio-economic programmes and believed in different sets of values. Because of these differences Lohia ruled out the possibility of any co-operation with the Congress either at the governmental or popular levels. The acceptance of the Fourteen Point Programme put up by Narayan to Nehru would not, in his opinion, have changed in the slightest degree the social or economic condition of India. He argued that the successful execution of a programme demanded concrete and well defined items in it, appropriate agencies and a favourable milieu, and that all these pre-requisites were absent from the Fourteen Point Programme.[31]

Lohia described Mehta's arguments in favour of 'the political compulsions of a backward economy' as based on 'faulty' and 'mechanical' reasoning, arguing that the co-operation of the people depended not 'on top co-operation among the parties' but on the character of the government and the kind of measures it adopted. In fact, the less a government deserved a people's co-operation with it the more was it likely to appeal for that co-operation. Lohia declared that the only way to secure the co-operation of the people was to promote their welfare. The parliamentary strength of the Congress was sufficient to ensure that an appropriate programme would command overwhelming support both in the legislatures and outside. Since the Congress party was not in need of support from opposition parties, Lohia felt that the invitation to the P. S. P. was either a meaningless gesture, or the Congress was trying to trick the P. S. P. into

30. *Report of the Special Convention of the Praja Socialist Party,* Bombay. 1953, p. 46.
31. *Ibid.*, p. 41.

sharing the discredit of its own administration. He condemned what he described as 'the attitude of mind' which talk of co-operation or coalition generated. The search for 'areas of agreement' with the Congress ignored the very much wider areas of disagreement. In a country like India, where naked social and economic injustices were still tolerated by the Congress government, the P. S. P. would 'stultify' itself by wilfully shutting its eyes to the wide areas of disagreement between its own programme and that of the ruling party.[32]

Though Dr. Lohia's criticism of Asoka Mehta's thesis at the Betul convention lacked intellectual depth, he certainly effectively voiced the feelings of the P. S. P. rank and file at this time. The main mass of members felt that any kind of co-operation between the P. S. P. and the Congress could lead to but one ultimate result; after a short interim of stagnation, the Party would completely disintegrate as a political force. Typical of the general mood of the convention was the comment of Triloki Singh, who declared that whatever value might be attached to Asoka Mehta's analysis, his conclusions were 'alarming' :

> He (Asoka Mehta) has talked of discovering areas of agreement with the Congress Party. I will most humbly submit to him that we should convert our Party into an organisation of social workers, and give up parliamentary politics and elections. But if we want to function as a political party let us not think in terms of the General Secretary's conclusions.[33]

The fear that any co-operation with the Congress might result in a merger between that party and the P. S. P. undoubtedly dominated the thinking of the rank and file Socialists at Betul.

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32. *Ibid.*, p. 44.
33. *Ibid.*, p. 57.

They were afraid that as the P. S. P. was so conspicuously lacking in parliamentary strength both at the Centre and in the States, the Party would quickly be treated as a poor relation by the Congress political 'bosses' in the event of a coalition government coming into being. These rank and file fears were undoubtedly well founded. And here one important point is worth emphasis.

The top leaders of the P. S. P. were thinking essentially in terms of the influence they could bring to bear at the Centre, whilst the rank and file were most concerned about the prejudicial results of a possible coalition in the States. The strength of the Party in parliamentary terms was indeed small both at the Centre and the State levels. But the presence in the Central Cabinet of such able national leaders as Jayaprakash Narayan, Acharya Narendra Deva, Acharya Kripalani, Asoka Mehta or Dr. Lohia would undoubtedly have carried great weight in the formulation and shaping of government policy, indeed far greater than the actual parliamentary strength of the P. S. P. would have warranted. This would not have been the case in the States where Congressmen, generally speaking, are far more parochial and limited in outlook and much more given to political intrigue than their fellow party members at the Centre. In the States, the Socialists would therefore almost certainly have been placed in a position of junior partnership with the Congress, and would have been powerless to influence the shaping of policy. This would have meant a serious diminution in their prestige, since as the State governments are closer to the people than the Central Parliament they have a correspondingly greater impact on public opinion. There was a very real danger that in the States the P. S. P. would share the discredit attaching to the Congress administrations rather than be able to make any positive contribution towards reshaping their policy.

It was fears such as these that were at the back of Lohia's demand and they were felt to be justifiable by the rank and file members at Betul. Naren Das, one of the delegates at the convention, admirably summed up the general view when he declared that the future of India depended not so much on the discovery of areas of agreement with 'Congress capitalism' but on 'projecting' the Praja Socialist Party as 'the alternative focus of power'. In a word, the P. S. P. should 'go it alone'.

Acharya Kripalani, presiding at the convention, pointed out that 'in one way or another the question of coalition government will always crop up'. No democratic party circumstanced as the P. S. P. was, could hope to get a working majority in all the legislatures. He thought it would be best to keep an open mind about joining coalitions and consider the question afresh each time it came up.

But the general consensus of opinion at the Betul convention was against both the logic of Asoka Mehta and the empiricism of Kripalani. The debate ended in both Asoka Mehta and Jayaprakash Narayan resigning from the National Executive, and they were followed by three joint secretaries. The resignations were however immediately withdrawn in deference to the wishes of the delegates and at the particular request of Dr. Lohia. The Betul Convention was brought to an end with the appointment of a Policy Commission, with Asoka Mehta and Dr. Lohia as secretaries, charged with the task of drafting a programme for the party.

It only remains to ask two questions about Asoka Mehta's thesis on 'the political compulsions of a backward economy'. First, was it a valied argument ? Secondly, if it was valid, was it an opportune moment to raise it ?

The core of Asoka Mehta's thesis was that in a country with a backward economy there are bound to be very special problems

over achieving rapid economic development through the agency of parliamentary government as it is normally practised. In such circumstances, opposition parties need to be highly responsible in outlook if they are not to develop into merely obstructive factions. His solution was to broad base the government in bringing into it all the opposition parties with a democratic and constructive approach, and to drive to the fringes all those opposition parties whose approach was non-democratic and destructive, i. e. the Communists and the Communalists. Only in this way would politics cease to be 'unreal' and the decks cleared for the launching of a bold programme of economic development capable of rapid implementation. It seems that Asoka Mehta was influenced in no small measure by the successes of the A. F. P. F. L. government in Burma where something like the situation which he envisaged really obtained.

There were clearly serious objections to the strategy suggested by Asoka Mehta. First, there was no real parallel between Burmese and Indian politics. He had over looked one striking dissimilarity between the balance of political forces in India and Burma. In Burma, the Socialists were a leading partner in the A. F. P. F. L.; in India, the Socialists, becuase of their weak parliamentary strength, would be very junior partners in any proposed coalitions.

Secondly, Mehta was in effect expressing scepticism about the efficacy of western parliamentary government as a means of solving the problems of a country with a backward economy. He was arguing that in India there was a special case for certain opposition parties, like the Socialists, co-operating with the ruling Party, the Congress. There was some truth in such an argument. Even in Britain, coalition governments have always been the usual response to emergency situations.

The main objection to the coalition government Mehta was advocating was that it would do nothing to change that polarisation of politics between the Congress and the Communists which the Socialists believed it was their special mission to end. For if the P. S. P. had joined with the Congress, then the Communists and the Communalists would have been left as the main opposition parties in the field, and of these the Communists were by far the most formidable.

Thirdly, even if we admit the validity of Asoka Mehta's argument, it is difficult to see how he could possibly convince himself that co-operation between the Congress and the P. S. P. was a practical possibility. For he produced his thesis on the 'political compulsions of a backward economy' at the Betul convention after the Nehru-Narayan talks had already broken down, and at a time when it was evident that there was general Socialist antagonism to the search for 'areas of agreement' with the Congress. The atmosphere of the Betul convention reflected the strong feeling that existed in the Socialist ranks on coalition government, and thus any further investigation of the problem was quite inopportune. Asoka Mehta himself admitted that the Nehru-Narayan talk about coalition had failed, among other reasons, because of fundamental disagreement on social policy.

One cannot therefore escape the conclusion that Asoka Mehta's thesis at the Betul convention, though an evidence of the acute political analysis of one of the Party's cleverest theoreticians, was quite untimely and merely succeeded in exacerbating dissensions at a time when the whole emphasis should have been put on the need for unity and cohesion.

After the leaders had withdrawn their resignations, the Betul convention ended in an atmosphere of rather artificial cordiality. This was to be very short lived since the Party was almost

immediately plunged into renewed bitter controversy over the police firing in Travancore-Cochin. But before we come to consider this issue it will be convenient to turn for a moment to Andhra politics.

The Attempt to form a Government in Andhra

Andhra bulked large at this time in P. S. P. politics because it provided the first crucial test of the integrity of the new Party. On March 25, 1953, the Prime Minister had announced the decision of the Centre to permit the creation of Andhra, as the first linguistic state in the country. The demand for the linguistic reorganisation of the Indian provinces had a history of over 30 years, the Congress having been committed to it since 1921. But after the achievement of independence the Congress leaders evinced great reluctance to abide by their pledges made in the colonial period on states reorganisation. Though the J. P. V. and Dhar Committees had been appointed to look into the question, it seemed that their sole purpose was to shelve the problem for as long as possible.

The demand for states reorganisation became so pronounced, and the delaying tactics of the Central Government caused such popular resentment, particularly in southern India where the movement had always been strong, that some of its advocates began to resort to violence. The culminating point was reached when a very much respected Gandhian and Congressman, Shri Ramulu, went on hunger strike in Madras to secure the creation of alinguistic state for the Telugus. His fast to death, by highlighting the mounting crisis, forced the hand of the Central Government which was finally compelled to agree to the formation of Andhra as a separate State for the Telegu speaking people.

T. Prakasham, the local P. S. P. leader, was the father of the movement for the formation of Andhra Pradesh, and as the most

respected leader of the new State was generally regarded as the most likely Chief Minister. His prospects as head of the first Andhra government were strengthened by the fact that there was no single party which enjoyed a clear majority in the State legislature. The rivalry between the lesser leaders there offered very little hope that a compromise on any other candidate could be secured.

The P. S. P. National Executive, in view of the peculiar situation in the State and its natural desire to see a P. S. P. Chief Minister take over, authorised Prakasham to 'take all steps that may in his view be necessary to consumate the establishment of the new state'.[34] Its intention in giving such wide powers to Prakasham seems clear. The P. S. P. National Executive was willing to permit the Andhra P. S. P. to join forces in a coalition government with other parties, including the Congress, in order to secure a stable administration.

This aim was made evident in September 1953 when a resolution of the P. S. P. National Executive declared that in view of :

> the particular situation in Andhra as a new province which needs to be stabilised on the basis of democracy, the Executive cannot rule out co-operation with other parties for forming a stable government.[35]

But the Congress party, the largest in the legislature, was unwilling to concede the leadership of the Government to a political leader of another party. They demanded that Prakasham should be 'released' from his party obligations by the P. S. P. and that he should join the Congress Legislature party as an associate member if he was to head the government.

34. *Two years of the Praja Socialist Party*, Bombay. 1954, p. 23. (This is a collection of the resolutions of the Party for the years 1952-54).
35. *Ibid.*

The reasons for this Congress demand were not far to seek. To secure a stable government in Andhra it was vital to have the support of the 16 members belonging to the P. S. P. as well as the co-operation of the various splinter groups, and this was possible only if Prakasham became the head of the government. On the other hand, the Congress was not willing to give the credit for providing a stable government to the very parties whose co-operation it needed, especially the P. S. P. The National Executive of the P. S. P. was not prepared to co-operate with the Andhra Congress leaders in this face-saving procedure, although the Andhra P. S. P. actually agreed to release Prakasham from his party obligations in order to meet the wishes of the Congress. The National Executive strongly repudiated this step of the Andhra P. S. P. declaring that the question of releasing any party member from his obligations 'can never arise nor be countenanced'.[36]

Thus another crisis seemed to threaten the Party. Prakasham brought matters to a head by resigning from the P. S. P. on September 25, 1953 and by joining the Congress Legislature Party as an associate member. He was followed by a number of other important P. S. P. members, including the chairman of the State Party who along with 10 other members of the Andhra legislature formed a new party, the Praja Party.

The Andhra crisis caused by the departure of Prakasham and his followers dealt a severe blow at the strength of the P. S. P. in the new State. Prakasham's action and the part played by the Congress in persuading him to desert were strongly deplored by the P. S. P. leaders. A resolution of the National Executive declared that 'This act of Shri Prakasham has set a deplorable

36. *Ibid.*, p. 24.

standard of political conduct'.[37] Jayaprakash Narayan ironically commented that 'the prestige of the Congress was considered more important than standards of political morality', and that by forcing Prakasham to resign from the P. S. P. The Congress had 'degraded party politics in the country'.[38]

For all that, the impact of the Andhra crisis on the P. S. P. must not be exaggerated. Indeed, there were almost audible sighs of relief from the many members of the Party who had been resolutely opposed to any kind of political deal with the Congress, but who had observed silence throughout the crisis lest they should be accused of sabotaging the efforts being made to set up a stable government in Andhra.

The main repercussions were confined to Andhra itself. It was undoubtedly a sad fact to be recognised that with the departure of Prakasham, Viswanatham and their followers, the second big attempt to build up a strong Socialist Party in Andhra had failed.

The P. S. P. Ministry in Travancore-Cochin

The Andhra crisis was a storm in a tea-cup compared with the tempest which raged within the Party over Travancore-Cochin. Here the Socialists for a brief moment in 1954 achieved their hearts' desire, the achievement of power. Yet their brief ministry in Travancore-Cochin touched off an explosion the effects of which were to threaten the Party with disintegration.

Let us first describe the sequence of events by which the P.S. P. formed a ministry in Travancore-Cochin before we discuss the major dissensions caused by the police firing. After the first general election, the majority held by the Congress over the other

37. *Ibid.*

38. *The Hindu*, Madras, Sept. 28, 1953.

parties in the Travancore-Cochin Assembly was a precarious one. The Congress had won 44 seats as opposed to 11 by the Socialists, 16 by 'Others' which included the Tamilnad Travancore Congress (T. T. N. C.), and 37 by Independents. In October 1953 the T. T. N. C., a splinter group of the Congress obsessed almost wholly with the linguistic states issue, decided to withdraw its support from the Congress government unless the latter supported its demand for the merger of the Tamil speaking areas of Travancore-Cochin with Madras. As the Congress Ministry was not prepared to concede this demand, the T. T. N. C. decided to join the opposition in the Assembly.

This dissension within the governments ranks obviously gave the opposition parties a change of bringing down the Congress Ministry. A favourable opportunity presented itself soon after the defection of the T. T. N. C. when the John Ministry brought before the Assembly a motion of confidence. The motion was defeated and the Chief Minister advised the Rajpramukh to dissolve the legislature instead of calling on any of the opposition leaders to endeavour to form a ministry. The Rajpramukh accepted this advice and Presidential rule was accordingly proclaimed in the State. This step was greatly resented by the opposition parties, and as the Central Government itself was not in favour of the continuation of Presidential rule for an indefinite period, it agreed soon afterwards to hold elections for a new State Assembly in February 1954.

The P: S. P. now had to face its usual dilemma both with regard to policy and strategy. What was to be its attitude to the Congress and the Communists ? During the first general election in T. C. the socialists had refused to come to any compromise arrangement with the Communists. And as we have already seen, without the inclusion of the Communist Party, the other left wing opposition parties and groups were not pre-

pared to join forces with the Socialists. Thus the Socialist Party had had to fight alone in the first general election in T. C. with the result that the Congress had profited from the split vote amongst the left wing parties.

The Praja Socialists by 1953 were rather more disposed towards trying to achieve an understanding with the other left wing parties in T. C. The Congress was now much more unpopular and much more on the defensive. More over, the Socialists were still smarting under the rebuff they had received from the Congress over the Prakasham affair in Andhra. The National Executive of the P. S. P. therefore decided to avoid triangular contests in the forthcoming elections, although it did not favour any agreement on party programmes.[39] This decision of the National Executive was endorsed at the Allahabad Conference of the P. S. P. in December 1953. A P. S. P. electoral policy was laid down to the effect that in a State where the ruling party was defeated on a confidence motion in the Assembly, the P. S. P. should enter into 'an electoral adjustment' for avoiding triangular contests with groups opposed to the ruling party.[40]

The implications of this policy were clear in the context of the forthcoming T. C. elections. Indeed the policy had been expressly devised for that specific situation. Though there was strong opposition at the Allahabad Conference to the National Executive's call for an 'electoral adjustment', and though an amendment which sought to negative the whole arrangement was defeated only by a narrow majority, the P. S. P. did arrive at an agreement on these lines with the United Front of leftists in T. C. to fight the elections on a basis of the avoidance of

39. *Two Years of the Praja Socialist Party,* Bombay, 1954, p. 24.
40. *Policy Statement of the Praja Socialist Party*, Bombay, 1954, p. 22.

triangular contests.[41] As a result of this bargain, the P. S. P. concentrated on fighting 40 seats where the Front agreed not to put up competing candidates. And the P. S. P. succeeded in winning 19 of these seats.

By this stroke of success the P. S. P. put itself in a strategic position in the T. C. Assembly, since the results of the elections made it clear that no stable government was possible without its inclusion. The U. L. F., which of course included the Communist thereupon offered to agree to a coalition between itself and the P. S. P. under the leadership of P. Thanu Pillai, the State P. S. P. leader. This offer however was rejected by the P. S. P. National Executive which made two alternative proposals. Either the P. S. P. should form a non-Communist and non-Congress coalition to which the Communists should give their support in the Assembly. Or alternatively, the National Executive proposed that there should be a coalition government of left wing parties including the Communists but without the Socialists.

This complex situation might have caused another crisis within the P. S. P., since the major complication was clearly the old issue of how to steer a distinct course wide of both the Congress and the Communists. The Socialists were saved by the Congress which had been adopting a 'wait and see' policy. Though there was little prospect of its being able to form a Ministry on its own, it was determined to forestall the creation of a Communist dominated administration in Travancore-Cochin. In the end the Congress expressed its readiness to offer informal support to a government led by the P. S. P., provided the Communists were excluded.[42] And it was along these lines that a solution

41. The U.L.F. was composed of the Communist, Revolutionary Socialist Kerala Socialist and Revolutionary Communist Parties.
42. *The Statesman Overseas Weekly*, Calcutta, March 20, 1954.

was found. The National Executive of the P. S. P. let it be known that the Party would be willing to form a government if asked to do so.[43]

Thus the one and only P. S. P. Ministry appeared in India with P. Thanu Pillai as Chief Minister. It was in a very weak position from the very beginning, being a minority government. The Pillai Ministry depended for its existence mainly on the tacit support of the Congress party, and it was brought down shortly afterwards when that support was withdrawn. It is to the events that led to the fall of the P. S. P. Ministry in T. C. that we should now turn. The crux of the whole affair was the police firing of August 1954 in Travancore-Cochin, the effects of which shook the Party's fragile structure to its very foundations.

The Police Firing in Travancore-Cochin, 1954

As we have already seen, the downfall of the Congress Ministry in T. C. which gave the Socialists their opportunity to achieve political power in that State was brought about by the defection of the T. T. N. C. over the question of the merger of the Tamil Speaking areas of T. C. with Madras. Within a few months of the entry into office of the P. S. P. Ministry, the T. T. N. C. again started to agitate for the fulfillment of this demand. The T. T. N. C. had found the Socialist Ministry unsympathetic towards their claims. Though the official policy of the P. S. P. was in favour of reorganisation of the Indian States on a unilingual basis, the P. S. P. Chief Minister, Thanu Pillai supported a multilingual state in this particular instance.

In August 1954 the local agitation came to a head when a demonstration organised by the T. T. N. C. in souch Travancore ended up in the use of violece. After attacks on public

43. *Two Years of the Praja Socialist Party*, Bombay, 1954, p. 25.

buildings and attempts to burn buses the police intervened. The demonstrators thereupon stoned the police and refused to disperse. Finding the situation getting out of hand the police fired on the demonstrators, with the result that four people were killed and over a dozen injured.

The news of the police firing in Travancore-Cochin set off another disastrous wrangle amongst the P. S. P. leaders. Dr. Lohia, in his capacity as General Secretary, sent a telegram to the Chief Minister from the Allahabad prison where he was then interned, asking Thanu Pillai to resign and demanding that a judicial enquiry should be held.[44] But the Chief Minister refused to take orders in this way from Dr. Lohia. As a consequence of this rebuff, Lohia promptly resigned from the General Secretaryship of the Party.[45]

The National Executive, which met in Delhi to discuss the firing on the Travancore demonstration, refused to endorse the directive sent by Lohia to the Chief Minister. It did, however, direct the T. C. government to appoint a judicial enquiry committee to look into the matter, making it clear it would defer its own decision until the findings of the committee were published. Confronted by a directive from the National Executive, the T. C. government gave way. At the same time, the National Executive appointed a committee of its own under the chairmanship of H. V. Kamath to examine the whole question of the use of firearms by State authorities.[46]

But Lohia and his followers refused to be silenced. They once again raised the old bogey of 'coalition' with the Congress

44. *Janata*, Bombay, August 29, 1954, p. 4.

45. *The Statesman Overseas Weekly*, Calcutta, August 18, 1954.

46. *Resolution of the National Executive of the Praja Socialist Party*, Sept. 4-6, 1954, *Janata*, Bombay, Sept. 12, 1954, p. 13.

and began what amounted to a campaign of vilification against Jayaprakash Narayan and Asoka Mehta.[47] To resolve this renewed dissension, a special conference of the P. S. P. was convened at Nagpur in November 1954. The convention endorsed the stand taken by the National Executive by 303 votes to 217, although, as these figures indicate, the opposition mustered considerable support.

At Nagpur, Lohia and his supporters argued that a resort to force by State authorities was justified only where there was an attempt at armed rebellion or actual killing. Other members of the National Executive, whilst conceding the force of Lohia's Gandhian arguments, were of the opinion that there might be other circumstances in which State authorities would be justified in using firearms. They quoted the report of the Kamath committee appointed by the National Executive :

> We think that the police in India should not be allowed to use force merely to disperse a crowd, an assembly or a procession, however illegal or unlawful it may be, unless :
>
> (1) such a crowd or procession or assembly causes so much obstruction to movement as would make it impossible for the public to carry out their normal avocations of life, and a diversion of traffic is not possible and the crowd cannot be dispersed by any other method,
>
> (2) their action causes serious damage to public or private property,
>
> (3) the crowd, assembly or procession, or any of its members are armed with deadly weapons and there is a clear and imminent danger of their being used,
>
> (4) there are two contending groups adopting such aggressive

47. *The Statesman Overseas Weekly*, Oct. 30, 1954, p. 13.
See also Madhu Limaye, 'Issues Before the Special Convention'. *Janata*, Oct. 10, 1954, pp. 3-4, and 6.

> and bellicose attitudes to one another that a riot is inevitable if they are not immediately dispersed, and every other means for dispersal had failed.[48]

Broadly speaking, the case put forward by Lohia and his group at Nagpur was that the resignation of the P. S. P. Ministry on the police firing issue would have set an example for the conduct of democratic administration, and by doing so would have emphasised the value set on the dignity of human life by the Socialists. Lohia pointed to individual instances when Ministers in Britain had resigned on quite trivial issues as matters of principle. Was not therefore the killing of four people a matter of principle worth the resignation of a government ?

The National Executive, however, took the view that since the democratic way of life was still in the making in India, it was no use expecting impossibly high standards of democratic behaviour on the part of the police. Moreover, since the P. S. P. had failed to lay down precisely the conditions and circumstances in which the police would be justified in resorting to force, the Party would have to take the blame for the police firing in Travancore :

> The National Executive, and indeed the socialist movement must take the blame for not enunciating these principles in clear terms before.[49]

The National Executive seemed to accept the verdict of the Kamath Committee which had declared :

> As regards the responsibility of the Ministry, we see no reason why its fate or career should be made to depend on an erring policeman, or upon the guile of an agent provocateur, or the tactics of any political party.[50]

48. *Report of the Kamath Committee,* Nagpur, 1954, p. 2.
49. *Resolution of the National Executive of the Praja Socialist Party, Janata,* Bombay, Sept. 12, 1954, p. 13.
50. *Report of the Kamath Committee,* Nagpur, 1954, p. 4.

Most of the delegates at Nagpur agreed that it was immoral to kill human beings in the way they had been killed in the Travancore police firing, and they deeply regretted that such a thing had taken place under a Socialist government. Both Acharya Kripalani and Jayaprakash Narayan took this view. On the other hand, the majority view was that it was not wise to condemn a Chief Minister for a political action which he, in all sincerity, did not feel himself responsible. Thanu Pillai had, after all, gone so far as to say that his honour as a gentleman was involved. It was therefore mistaken idealism to press for the resignation of his Ministry because of the police firing.

Beneath the unrealistic moralising at the Convention there ran strong undercurrents of suspicion and distrust. One group felt that Dr. Lohia and his followers desired the resignation of the Pillai Ministry for reasons other than those stated. There was the suspicion that what Lohia and his group really took exception to was the dependence of the Pillai Ministry on the support of the Congress. They felt that the Travancore-Cochin situation might be repeated elsewhere in the country, and that co-operation between the P. S. P. and the Congress might thus become a permanent feature of Indian politics. The P. S. P. should therefore take a decisive stand while there was still time to assert its autonomy.

Since there was little mutual trust between the supporters of the National Executive and the Lohia group at Nagpur, no amount of philosophising about the ethics of the police firing could have brought them to any agreement. All we can say is that, in their opposition to the stand taken by the National Executive on the police firing in Travancore-Cochin, Dr. Lohia and his followers over-played their hands. They under-estimated the loyalty of the mass of the delegates to the Party and

to the first Socialist Ministry in India. There was a strong feeling that the T. T. N. C. demonstration, as well as the whole agitation which had inspired it, had been organised deliberately in order to discredit the P. S. P. Ministry. Dr. Lohia's criticisms, therefore, though legitimate, were untimely coming as they did at a time when Party cohesion was essential.

On the other hand, there were also those who, whilst disagreeing with Lohia over his attitude towards coalition with the Congress, supported him on moral grounds in his demand for the resignation of the Pillai Ministry. These people might possibly be compared with the pacifists in the British Labour Party.

The Resignation of the National Executive

Although the National Executive's policy was approved by the Nagpur Convention by a handsome majority, the crisis created by the Travancore-Cochin police firing was not brought to an end. Indeed, it was greatly aggravated by the resignation of the members of the National Executive.

Immediately after the result of the voting on the resolution on the police firing had been declared, the Chairman announced the intention of the National Executive to resign. When asked to reconsider such a serious step, the Chairman, Acharya Kripalani refused to do so. Not did Dr. Lohia, who was very much cast down by what he considered to be a personal defeat, show any readiness to accept responsibility at this stage.

The behaviour of the P. S. P. leaders at this juncture caused a bewilderment quite unparalleled in the whole history of the Indian socialist movement. The initial confusion at the Nagpur Convention was aptly described by a correspondent of *Janata*, the main organ of the Party, when he declared that 'For a few hours the Party appeared to be leaderless, orphaned and completly

broken'.[51] But the uncertainty thus created did not last long, and the crisis in fact gave an opportunity for significant new forces to assert themselves within the Party. For the first time in the history of the Party the delegates took it upon themselves to resolve a major crisis in the organisation. They made frantic efforts to get the leaders to realise what the disintegration of the P. S. P. would mean to the country and to the socialist movement as a whole. They emphasised their determination to keep the Party intact even if the leaders continued to quarrel amongst themselves.

This forceful line of the general mass of delegates made a strong impression on some of the leaders, and a compromise solution was eventually achieved. The universally respected, Acharya Narendra Deva, at the unanimous request of all the various groups and their leaders, agreed to carry the burden of running the Party despite the fact that his health was now failing. By a unanimous decision he was given the power to nominate the National Executive as well as the General Secretary.[52]

The fact is, of all the national leaders of the Party, Acharya Narendra Deva was the only one in whom all sections of the organisation had implicit and unquestioned faith. He was the only leader with whose political thinking most of the P. S. P. rank and file were in agreement, and he had managed to hold himself aloof from the recent destructive controversies. With Acharya Narendra Deva at the helm, the more optimistic members of the Party now hoped that they might achieve the unity which had so far eluded them. Yet one cannot escape the conclusion that the assumption of the leadership by the ailing Acharya

51. *Janata*, Bombay, Dec. 5, 1954, p. 10.
For a brief review of the proceedings of the Nagpur Special Convention of the P. S. P. see *Janata*, Dec. 5, 1954, pp. 9-10 and 16.
52. *Ibid.*, p. 7

Narendra Deva was really little more than a convenient stop-gap arrangement until a better understanding could be reached amongst the other leaders. In actual fact, these hopes of bringing unity to a sorely divided Party were now wrecked by yet another controversy.

The Expulsion of Madhu Limaye

At its Avadi session in 1955 the Congress Party declared its objective to be the establishment of 'a socialistic pattern of society' in India. This declaration which was preceded by the passing of a similar resolution in the Indian Parliament reopened inside the P. S. P. the old controversial issue of co-operation with the Congress. Foreseeing the likelihood of renewed conflict over the Party's attitude to Congress 'Socialism', Acharaya Narendra Deva made the following comment on the Avadi programme :

> For this new venture to succeed, it is necessary that the Prime Minister should take some more steps. The Congress will have to be overhauled completely and purged of all reactionary elements, and the bureaucracy will have to work with a new spirit in order that they may be able to achieve the new objective.
>
> I have grave doubts whether the Congress leaders will ever succeed in transforming these institutions. The very fact that not a single member of the Congress Parliamentary Party stood up in opposition to the resolution sponsored by the Prime Minister showed that the whole atmosphere was unreal. It was more out of respect for his wishes than because of any inner conviction that the Congress Party voted solidly for the proposition. This change in the declaration of the policy of the Congress, however, is to be welcomed

as it demonstrates the growing strength of democratic socialism.[53]

This firm but constructive criticism by the Chairman should have allayed the suspicions of those in the Party who now feared the reopening of talks for co-operation between the P. S. P. and the Congress. Since the Chairman had taken a firm line, it would have been better if other members had been prepared to let sleeping dogs lie.

But this was not to be so. Madhu Limaye, as ex-joint Secretary of the Party, in an article in the *Free Press Journal* declared that the vast majority of the P. S. P. considered the Congress Party's 'newest' declaration of faith in socialism 'a colossal fraud' on the electorate.[54] In normal circumstances, this comment might have been accepted as representative of the Praja Socialist attitude to the Congress Party's so-called 'socialistic' objectives. But in the delicate situation which existed in the P. S. P. at this time this forthright expression of opinion was bound to provoke equally forthright opposition opinions.

Madhu Limaye's views were immediately challenged by a group of nine P. S. P. members from Bombay, who made a request to the Chairman of the Party to reopen a discussion on the Allahabad Policy Statement, since non-co-operation with the Congress had now become in their opinion 'somewhat obsolete' in the light of the Avadi resolution.[55] In a rejoinder, Madhu Limaye alleged that he would have ignored the statement of the Bombay group, were it not for the sure knowledge that one weighty individual inspired it'.[56] Two days

53. *The Hindu*, Madras, January 20, 1955.
54. *Free Press Journal*, Bombay, January 24, 1955.
55. *The Times of India*, Bombay, February 10, 1955.
56. *Free Press Journal*, Bombay, February, 15, 1955.

later he made it clear to whom he was referring, when he declared that 'the Mehta (i. e. Asoka Mehta) group' wanted the P. S. P. to welcome the Avadi declaration and co-operate with the Congress.[57]

Superficially this allegation seemed to be true, since as we have seen, Asoka Mehta was in favour of 'areas of agreement' with the Congress. Nevertheless, Limaye's challenge to the Bombay group was quite uncalled for because there was no real danger of an alliance between the P. S. P. and the Congress. The Chairman had already made the official attitude to Congress 'Socialism' clear and there was no need to start washing dirty linen in public again. But the allegations made against Asoka Mehta and the statement by the nine Bombay members now made it necessary for Acharya Narendra Deva to take determined action if further acute dissension within the Party was to be avoided.

In a signed editorial in *Janata*, the Chairman accordingly invited Madhu Limaye to apologise to Asoka Mehta. And to the nine members who had asked him to reopen a discussion on the policy of the Party towards the Congress he addressed the following rebuke :

> To those comrades who have come out with a statement which has been the subject of adverse criticism by Shri Madhu Limaye I would say that though they have every right to express their views, yet in my humble opinion it is not consistent with the self-respect of the Party to make an offer of co-operation to the Congress unsolicited. You may be actuated by the purest of motives, but your offer will always remain suspect. Your Party men will accuse

57. *Facts on Lohia's Attempt at Disrupting the P. S. P.* New Delhi, 1955, p. 11.

you of the betrayal of Party interests, the public will suspect that some ulterior motive must be behind the move, and the Congress will remain impassive and unresponsive. You may not only lose your self respect in the bargain. In politics, altruism is a rare commodity, and when a small and weak party makes such an offer, it is bound to be looked upon with suspicion. And, if you are of the view that the Congress is anxious to secure the co-operation of other political parties in the task of reconstruction, you are simply deluding yourselves.[58]

The Chairman thus admonished the members concerned in an endeavour to restore unity to the Party and also in order to clarify the official position. When Madhu Limaye failed to respond, the Chairman went out of his way to ask the secretary of the Bombay P. S. P. not to take any action against him under Rule 10 relating to the code of conduct of Party Members.[59] The Bombay Party accordingly refrained from taking any action against Madhu Limaye, though the Executive disowned his criticism of Asoka Mehta and the statement of the nine Bombay members who had called for a reconsideration of P. S. P. policy towards the Congress.

Madhu Limaye and his friends, having tried and failed to amend the resolution at the meeting of the Executive, thereupon demanded a meeting of the Council of the Party in Bombay. There too their attempts to amend the resolution of the Exe-

58. *Janata*, Bombay, Feb. 27, 1955.

59. 'Complaints against Party members, or committees should not be publicly ventilated. They should be referred to the Executive Committee concerned.' Rule No. 10.
Constitution, Rules & Code of Conduct of the Praja Socialist Party, Bombay, 1954, p. 15.

cutive failed. During these deliberations in the City Council Limaye accused M. Harris, Chairman of the Bombay Party of partiality, and moved a non-confidence motion against him. But this was defeated by a large majority. Having failed in these efforts, Limaye with 21 of his friends staged a walk-out from the meeting and held a press conference at which he made various allegations against the Chairman of the Bombay City Party. He condemned the decision of the Council as unconstitutional and repeated his original charges against Asoka Mehta.

The Executive of the Bombay City Party at its meeting on March 26, 1955 therefore suspended Madhu Limaye. The National Executive confirmed this decision, but later on the Chairman, Acharya Narendra Deva, ruled that the National Executive had no power either to confirm or reject the suspension of a member by a provincial committee. It could only take not of its action.[60]

Madhu Limaye's suspension brought the irrepressible Dr. Lohia back into the picture. He now issued a statement condemning the Bombay Executive as 'partisans of paralysed socialism'; and proceeded to give Limaye good publicity by asking Party Committees to invite the suspended member for speaking engagements. This was a particularly irresponsible action even for Lohia who could scarcely be called a disciplined member of the Party. The National Executive warned Lohia of the consequences of such action and asked Party units to pay no attention to his sponsoring of the rebel Limaye.

However, the Executive Committee of the U. P. branch of the Party decided in response to Lohia's statement to invite Limaye to inaugurate the annual conference of the U. P. unit

60. *Facts on Lohia's Attempt at Disrupting the P. S. P.*, New Delhi, 1955, P. 19.

on May 23, 1955, though not before the Chairman of the Party had tried to dissuade them from such indiscipline. But as these efforts were without success, the National Executive was forced to meet on June 3, 1955 in order to consider the situation which had now arisen. Dr. Lohia, the person most responsible for the U. P. Executive's defiance of the directives of the Chairman over the Limaye issue, was also invited to attend. His failure to accept the invitation was interpreted as further evidence of his increasingly uncooperative and undisciplined behaviour.

The National Executive had no option but to suspend the U. P. Executive along with its Chairman, Gopal Narain Saksena, the latter being suspended because of his criticism of the National Executive's warning to Dr. Lohia not to sponsor Madhu Limaye's suggested speaking tour in U. P. The National Executive also banned the conference which the U. P. Executive had proposed to stage, and appointed an *ad hoc* committee to carryon the activities of the Party in U. P. until a representative conference could be called.[61]

But the Chairman of the U. P. Executive and his friends refused to accept these rulings of the National Executive and went ahead with the organisation of their conference in which the suspended Madhu Limaye participated. Significantly enough, the U. P. conference was addressed by Dr. Lohia who congratulated the organisers on their defiance of the National Executive. Some of the leading organisers were later suspended by the *ad hoc* committee set up by the National Executive.

Thus the P. S. P. staggered on from crisis to crisis. But even worse was yet to come. We must now relate the disastrous

61. *Ibid.*, p. 24.

denouncement which was no less than the split in the Party brought about by the suspension of the turbulent Dr. Lohia.

The Suspension of Dr. Ram Manohar Lohia

The Conference of rebel members in U. P. to which reference has just been made, met at Gazipur. There Dr. Lohia had the astonishing effrontery to accuse the other leaders of the P. S. P. of what he called 'crude personalism' :

> Crude personalism prevails in the shape of the leaders wanting to have their nominees selected as assembly and parliamentary candidates. Leaders adjust their claims with one another accordingly to their importance, and if anybody refuses to fall in with this personalism and wants to encourage collective decisions by appropriate comittees, he is denounced as an individualist by the wolf-pack of leaders.[62]

Dr. Lohia declared that such 'shameless' acts were possible only because the National Executive acted on the popular but mistaken notion that Party discipline had to be enforced by the higher on the lower units of the Party. In his opinion, the defeat of the National Executive in this controversy would in reality have symbolised the healthy growth of the Party rather than the opposite, since freely expressed opposition was always an asset in any organisation. As it was, the victory of the National Executive would help to destroy democracy within the Party by reinforcing 'monolithic control' and by terrorising dissident elements into submission.[63]

These views put forward in all seriousness by a leader of Lohia's status were enough to undermine the prestige of a party which by this time had been gravely weakened by continuous

62. Jagdish Shah, *Socialism Paralysed*, Amritsar, 1956, pp. 23-24.
63. *Ibid.*, p. 23.

internal squabbling. However, the pass to which the Party had been brought did not greatly bother Dr. Lohia, since he already seems to have been thinking of forming a new party out of the ruins of the old. Even before the suspension of the U. P. Executive he had remarked :

> If the paralysed and impotent P. S. P. does not reform itself within four to six months, a new, vigorous and youthful party will have to be formed to save the country from ruin.[64]

Lohia now contemptuously described the P. S. P. leaders as merely 'brokers' between the 'collaborationists' and the 'militants', and characterised their whole political approach as parasitic. On july 18, 1955 he returned to the attack by declaring that the P. S. P. was an 'impotent' organisation, that its programme and policy were 'diluted', that the Party was suffering from 'paralysis' and that many of the leaders were 'frightened' to death of the Congress.[65]

Thus day by day in 1955 the Party's fortunes went from bad to worse and it seemed that only a miracle could save it from complete disintegration. The National Eexecutive finally decided to hold a camp of Provincial Chairmen and Secretaries together with its own members and other leading personalities. Dr. Lohia was also invited but refused to attend. The meeting took place at Jaipur from July 15 to 22, 1955.

After a review of the organisational problems of the Party, the consensus of opinion at the camp was in favour of the suspension of Dr. Lohia, who was held primarily responsible for the growing and lamentable lack of discipline in the Party.

64. *The Indian Nation*, Patna, June 17, 1955.
See also *Hindustan Standard*, Calcutta, June 25, 1955.
65. *National Herald*, Lucknow, July 3, 1955.

The National Executive took note of this feeling and temporarily suspended Lohia from the Party. But pending a final decision, it directed the General Secretary to seek from Dr. Lohia an explanation for his antagonism to the National Executive. When Lohia refused to acknowledge the General Secretary's letter, it was clear that the split in the Party was to all intents and purposes complete. Lohia's suspension was now confirmed. It was followed by the resignation of his followers and by the suspension by the National Executive and State Executives of those units which had supported Lohia.

Thus was brought about the greatest of the many catastrophes which the struggling Indian Socialist movement had had to face, a tragic anti-climax to the high hopes placed in the Praja Socialist Party at its birth in 1952.

Was The Split Inevitable ?

To attempt to answer such a question we need to look beyond the immediate causes of the suspension of Dr. Lohia and the U. P. Executive to the fundamental problem—the divided mind of the Socialist leadership, its inability to reconcile Marxism, Gandhism and Social Democracy. We shall briefly consider this root problem in our concluding chapter.

All we can say at this stage is that by 1955 the basic differences between the leaders had become irreconcilable. Some of the leaders, like Asoka Mehta and Dr. Lohia, were fast becoming the prisoners of their own slogans. Owing to his essentially pragmatic approach to politics, Mehta appreciated the need for walking warily in a delicate situation and did not actively campaign for the acceptance of his views on coalition with the Congress. But Lohia and his followers were far more intolerant towards those who disagreed with them, and because there was no mutual trust left between the leaders, the Lohia group was quite

unconvinced by the Chairman's assurances over the vexed question of co-operation with the Congress.

In such a situation there was only one possible solution left if the secession of Lohia was to be avoided—the hand-over of the Party organisation to him and his followers. But in their obsession against the so-called 'collaborationists' with the Congress, Lohia and his group had already alienated so many party members that to give him the leadership would have provoked an even worse split.

The fact is that Dr. Lohia worked on the principle that those who were not his friends were his enemies. In his campaign against Asoka Mehta and his supporters, Lohia did not spare even those who actually disapproved of Mehta's policy of 'collaboration' but who equally disapproved of the intemperate language Lohia was using against his former colleagues. In such a situation only a graceful expression of regret could have won over those whom he had so deeply offended. But as he would not acknowledge his own defects of character he chose to split the Party on the rock of his own innate and headstrong individualism.

As it happened, Lohia did not get as much support from the rank and file as he had anticipated, and most of the members preferred to remain within the P. S. P. Acharya Narendra Deva's repeated rebuttal of Lohia's charges, the sense of loyalty of the rank and file and Lohia's own complete lack of restraint were all important factors in preventing what at one time had seemed inevitable—the complete disintegration of the Praja Socialist Party.

Even so, we ring down the curtain on our history of the Party on a by no means edifying spectacle of political bickering and extreme confusion.

CHAPTER 8 CONCLUSION

The main aim of the Indian Socialists has always been to reconcile socialism with nationalism, the two dominant forces of the age in 20th century India. From its inception in 1934, the Party sought to prove that the achievement of national freedom and an egalitarian society were inseparable objectives. It is pertinent to conclude our study by recapitulating both its successes and failures in the task it set itself.

The Congress Socialist Party was what Duverger would call a party of extra-parliamentary origin.[1] As we have seen, it arose as an expression of the profound dissatisfaction of the 'Nasik Group' of young Congressmen in the early '30s with what they considered to be Mahatma Gandhi's unsuccessful techniques of struggle through the Civil Disobedience Movements. To the Socialists, the achievement of national freedom was only half the battle. Its real importance lay in the opportunities it would offer for the achievement of an egalitarian society, for the ideological basis of which they looked to Marx and other Western socialist thinkers. Since any progress towards such a society was out of the question in a colonial situation, they actively participated in the struggle for national freedom under the banner of the Indian National Congress. And as they were not satisfied with what they regarded as the 'go slow' policy of the Congress leaders, they campaigned from the beginning for a more militant course of action against the continuance of colonial

1. Duverger, Maurice. *Political Parties*, London, 1955, p. xxx.

rule. But throughout the colonial period they never lost sight of their socialist principles. From its birth the Party set itself the task of shaping and moulding Congress policy in a socialist direction. During the late 1930s the Socialists played a prominent part in building up workers' and peasants' organisations, and though they belonged to the Congress, they never hesitated to oppose it on any matter over which they felt that their socialist principles were compromised.

During the early years of its existence, the C. S. P. set itself to objectives. First, it tried to convince the Congress leaders that the successful waging of the national struggle demanded the broadening of the base of the movement by the active participation of far more workers and peasants that had hitherto been drawn in. Secondly, the C. S. P. tried to convince the masses that their struggle for better living and working conditions was intimately allied with the political struggle for freedom from colonial rule. The C. S. P. campaigned ceaselessly to get the Congress High Command to understand that the base of the movement could never be successfully broadened unless the Congress gave concrete evidence of its intention to improve the terrible social and economic conditions of the masses. That both the Congress leaders and the masses on occasion failed to realise the inseparable connection between the economic and the political struggles was certainly no fault of the Socialists. It was no mean achievement to get the Kisan Sabha and Trade Union movements to pay as much attention to the national as to the economic struggle and to get the conservative minded Congress leaders to adopt the Faizpur Agrarian Programme.

A similar approach was adopted by the C. S. P. towards the youth movement. With the exception of the Congress itself, the C. S. P. did more than any other single group to bring the youth of the country into the nationalist fold. As on the Trade

Union and peasant fronts, the Socialists played a major part in preventing India's youth from drifting away from the Congress through frustration over the ineffectiveness of Gandhism and other features of an essentially conservative leadership.

The Party's appeal to the Kisan Sabha, Trade Union Movement and the youth movement stemmed largely from its policy of militant action and its Marxist ideology. As we have seen, though there ware undoubtedly other formative influences, Marxism was the most important single influence in the creation of the C. S. P. in 1934. Though the presence of three main strands in the Party–Marxism, Gandhism and Social Democracy–left it with ideological homogeneity, nevertheless, everyone was agreed upon a redical programme for social and economic change. And here the main contribution of the Socialists to political thinking lay in their efforts to reconcile the aims and techniques of Marxism with the fight for national independence. This was where the Socialists so obviously scored over the Communists who, as the pawns of the Third International, subordinated Indian nationalism to Stalinism. The Socialists' participation in the national struggle persuaded many radical nationalists that there was no basic incompatibility between nationalism and socialism. This was undoubtedly a major achievement.

Another feature of the activities of the C. S. P. during this period was that it injected much needed new blood into the national movement which, if not suffering from hardening of the arteries, was at least too much dominated by elderly leaders who had become set in their ideas and ways. The Socialist leaders were all young, intellectually able, possessed of immense vitality and idealism, and with the necessary strength of character and initiative to justify their claim that they could take over the leadership of the national movement should there be any faltering

by the Old Guard. The importance of these qualities and the effectiveness of the Socialists as an alternative leadership could not be better illustrated than at the time of the August Movement of 1942. Only the most partisan observer would deny to the Socialists the credit for this successful display of militancy at a crucial culminating phase in the development of the national movement.

Turning to the immediate post-war phase prior to the hand-over of power, it must be admitted there was some confusion in the Socialists' political thinking. Because of their isolation during the War from the main stream of world affairs and their lack of knowledge of the momentous changes that had taken place in the general power situation, they at first quite failed to appreciate the radical transformation which was being brought about in the structure of the British Empire. They remained acutely suspicious of the honesty of British intentions towards India because of their doctrinaire belief that no imperialist power would capitulate unless driven by force to do so. As a consequence, their policy during the period of negotiations immediately preceding the hand-over of power was characterised by confusion and indecision.

For a time the Socialists seemed to think they were cast for a similar role to that of Mahatma Gandhi after the end of the First World War, and that they should endeavour to wrest the leadership of the national movement from the control of the 'liberal constitutionalists'. But the policy of the British Government during the years 1945-7, coupled with the Socialists own doctrinaire approach to the problem of 'colonialism', led them towards a policy of hesitancy and indecision which they sought to justify by the name of 'neutrality'. By refusing either to approve or oppose the Partition the Socialists temporarily abandoned their role as the radical and militant wing of the nationalist

movement and allowed the mentle of opposition to fall on the communalists, both within and without the Congress. The Party must thus share in the responsibility for the disastrous Partition.

Another but less costly error of the C. S. P. during this period was its boycott of the elections for the Constituent Assembly. It is doubtful if the Socialists could ever have exercised any really effective influence in framing the Indian constitution from within the Assembly. Nevertheless, membership of that body might have been useful as an opportunity to publicise the views of the Party on specific features of the Constitution like fundamental rights. Furthermore, the presence of two dozens or so Socialists on the opposition benches might have added something to the prestige of the Party in the country at large. And the experience gained in the actual framing of the Constitution, as well as in the debating of Bills when the Constituent Assembly sat as a legislative body, might have been useful as an initiation into the working of parliamentary government.

It took the Socialists some little time to find their feet in post-independence India. But from the outset they were careful to maintain their freedom of action by refusing to join either the Central or provincial governments. Their main problem was whether as nationalists they would be justified in actually opposing the programme and policies of India's first national government. But the general trend of Congress policies, both at the Centre and in the States, quickly led the Socialists to believe that their opposition was both desirable and justifiable. The changes in the Congress Constitution were the last straw, for they provided a clear indication that the Congress leaders were no longer willing to tolerate stringent Socialist criticism from within their own ranks. Thus excluded from power within

the Congress, the Socialists took their historic decision at the Nasik Conference to break away from the Congress.

The decision to part company with the parent organisation was both a 'pilgrimage into the wilderness' and an 'adventure into utopia', and we are bound to ask ourselves whether this momentous step was really necessary. Such a question takes us to the heart of the Socialists' political thinking. To the founders of the C. S. P. the real meaning of Swaraj had always been not simply the ending of colonial rule but the emancipation of the masses from exploitation and injustice. Since the initial performance of the Congress governments held out little hope of a radical, social and economic programme, and since its policies were clearly intended to serve the interests of the Indian capitalists and landlords, the Socialists were, according to their own lights, perfectly justified in breaking away. By doing so they not only remained true to their political principles, but they also gave a lead to the disillusioned masses who were rapidly losing faith in Congress promises.

The Socialists' separation from the Congress served another purpose. Although India after independence had chosen a parliamentary system of government, it was difficult to see how it could take root without a parliamentary opposition willing to play this most difficult political game according to the recognised rules. Not only was the Congress a monolithic party, but such opposition to it as existed came mainly from the Communists and other revolutionary groups who were hostile to the whole concept of parliamentary democracy. But by 1948, the Socialist leaders were becoming increasingly convinced of the feasibility of achieving socialism in India by evolutionary rather than by revolutionary methods. The main influences on their political thinking had come from their new contacts with Western social democrat leaders and their increasing knowledge

of life behind the Iron Curtain countries. The Indian Socialists had always been convinced that political democracy was incomplete without economic democracy. Their study of one party rule in the Soviet Union and other communist countries now convinced them that economic democracy (if even that existed in Russia) was incomplete without political democracy.[2] The more they studied the institutional aspects of socialism in the communist countries the more appalled they became at the lack of political freedom. This led them gradually to a realisation of the value of such western achievements as a free press, free trade unions and opposition parties dedicated to the overthrow by peaceful means of governments in power.

Thus the general result of the break away from the Congress was to accustom the Socialists more and more to the idea that they should constitute the core of a radical but responsible opposition within the framework of parliamentary government. Their entry into the political arena as an independent party with a militant social and economic programme, but wedded to parliamentary democracy, thus offered an alternative to those who had become disillusioned with the Congress, but who had no wish to turn to the Communists. It was considerations such as these that won the Party much of its support in its main strongholds of Bombay, Bihar, U. P., Assam and Madhya Pradesh.

Nevertheless, it would be idle to pretend that the Socialists broke away from the Congress simply because they were suddenly obsessed by a mission to stand forth as the only radical but responsible opposition parliamentary party. This could scarcely be proved, as some of the Socialist leaders have remained to this day unconvinced about the applicability of western parliamentary democracy, without modifications, to Indian conditions.

2. *Policy Statement of the Socialist Party*, Bombay, 1951, pp. 6-7.

This brings us to what, to any western observer, must seem the most baffling feature of Indian Socialism—its attempted synthesis of the seemingly contradictory elements of Marxism, Gandhism and Social Democracy. It has been one of the main purposes of this thesis to underline the dilemmas that have arisen over the effort to reconcile these major strands in the social, economic and political thinking of the Indian Socialists.

Although some of the leaders might be pointed to as exceptions, it would be true to say that the general outlook of the Congress Socialist Party from 1934 to 1947 was that of doctrinaire Marxism. It was based on hostility to Gandhism and to parliamentary government in the restricted form in which the British permitted it to function in colonial India. The principal danger of the Socialists' Marxism during the period from 1934 to 1942 was that it might lead to their capture by the Communists, the fate which overtook so many European Socialist parties. Not only did a founding father of the Congress Socialist Party like Narayan start his political life as a Communist, but in the late 1930s there was every incentive to form 'united fronts' against imperialism and fascism with the Communists. The parting of the ways undoubtedly came in 1942 with the unpatriotic action of the Communists in supporting the British war effort in India. Ever since then the intense nationalism of the Indian Socialists has led them to keep the Communists at arms' length.

Since independence, Gandhian socialism and western democratic socialism have been incorporated, along with their original Marxism, into the political thinking of the Socialists. The former antagonists of the Mahatma have now taken over certain aspects of his teaching like satyagraha, inseparability of ends and means, and decentralisation both in government and industry, all of which they feel can be successfully used under

Indian conditions for the achievement of a socialist society. Jayaprakash Narayan, under the influence of Vinoba Bhave, and in the Indian tradition of renunciation, has even created his own ashram in Bihar in pursuit of 'constructive work' in the villages. At the same time, as already stated, the Socialists have come more and more to recognise the importance of the liberal tradition in western democratic socialism, especially in its emphasis on the rights of the individual.[3]

Indian Socialism, by virtue of the element of Gandhian socialism, is thus far from being the wholly foreign importation it once seemed likely to be in the days of the leaders' largely unmodified Marxism. But though the recent Gandhian element in the Socialists' social, economical, political thinking, to a non-Indian, may seem the most surprising of the three constituents—particularly in view of the C. S. P's antagonism to the Mahatma in the colonial period—to an Indian Socialist to-day it is possibly the most natural. The spell of the Mahatma binds in varying degrees not only the Socialists but all political parties in India except the Communists.

Can one say that a satisfactory synthesis has been achieved ? No one looking at the history of the leaders' differences of opinion and their frantic theorising could make any such claim. A synthesis may be emerging but it has not yet been achieved. The major incongruities between these three strange bedfellows are still clear for all to see. Marxism postulates violence as the basis of the state, Gandhism postulates non-violence; Marxism puts the emphasis on centralised planning and industrialisation; Gandhism is rooted in anti-industrialism and decentralisation of both government and industry; Marxism and Gandhism are

3. *Report of the Second National Conference of the Praja Socialist Party*, Delhi, 1956, p. 170.

opposed to parliamentary government, Social Democracy can use no other instrument. To reconcile such incongruities the Socialists have come out in favour of decentralised planning, and satyagraha as an alternative to parliamentary action. But decentralised planning to a Westerner may seem a contradiction in terms and resort to satyagraha as quite incompatible with the recognised procedures of parliamentary government. Nevertheless, despite the obvious inconsistencies it may well be that the three main elements will ultimately achieve a fusion in the minds of the Indian Socialists. That the task is not inherently impossible is evident from the psychology of Mr. Nehru himself which is a compound of Marxism, Social Democracy, Western liberal ideas and Gandhism.

It must be conceded however that ideological differences within the Party, combined with the anarchical attitude to discipline evinced by such leaders as Lohia, have undoubtedly deprived the Socialists of the much needed cohesion which was vital if the Party was to become an effective political force. The lamentable performance of the Socialist leaders after the first General Election is a case in point. Even more amazing was the subsequent retirement of most of the top leaders of the Party from active politics.[4] Such an abdication of responsibility by leaders of a Party which still wished to win votes at elections is almost without a parallel. In this sense, the Socialists have been their own worst enemies. They started with enough disadvantages, even if they had been united in outlook. They had little or no funds with which to make headway against a political machine like the Congress which had the backing of both landlords and industrialists and a high degree of cohesion

4. These leaders were Jayaprakash Narayan, Kamaladevi Chattopadhyaya, Ramnandan Mishra.

and discipline brought about by years of struggle as a national movement. By largely through their lack of political realism and their inability to do their arguing amongst themselves behind closed doors like any other disciplined Party, the Socialists succeeded in weakening their Party by their publicly advertised internal schisms far more than it was ever weakened by its opponents' criticisms. But for the disastrous dissensions which emasculated the Party after 1952 it might have fared far better than it did at the second General Election in 1957.[5] At that time, and as the results show, there was much dissatisfaction with the Congress, and the Socialists' idealism and integrity should have been major political assets in their favour.

It might of course be argued that the extra-parliamentary origin of the Party played some part in depriving it of political realism and in fostering political indiscipline. The Congress had had the invaluable experience of both fighting previous elections (though it is true they were on a restricted franchise) and in running the Provincial Governments after 1937. In the process, it had thrown up stute party managers and political bosses like Sardar Patel who were adepts at hushing up dissension with a firm and resolute hand. The Communists, in addition to ample funds and a highly efficient political organisation, had even more ruthless methods of purging opposition critics within their own ranks. But the Socialist fell between two stools. They had neither the parliamentary experience of the Congress nor the ruthlessness of the Communists. Though their leaders' decisions, only two often, were imposed on an acquiescing rank and file, the leaders insisted on the democratic right of thrashing out their differences in public. The results were disastrous.

5. Mehta, Asoka. 'The Political Mind of India', *Foreign Affairs*, New York, July 1957.

Yet it would be wrong to end on a note of pessimism. Despite their failure in the field of organisation the Socialists have made their own unique contribution to Indian politics. It is their role as 'unofficial policy makers' that will probably be seized upon by future historians as their particular claim to fame. The Socialists have included in their ranks some of the most intelligent, nimble and discerning minds of modern India. They have been intensely articulate and very clear-sighted. For years they have acted as a continual goad spurring on the unwieldy, slow moving conservative Congress in the direction of a socialist India. As we have already shewn, it was largely Socialist pressures which brought about the Congress agrarian programme in the 1930's. It was the Socialists, and not Mr. Nehru, who first advocated neutralism as the foreign policy most appropriate for free India. And it would not be going too far to say that Congress 'Socialism' itself, as expressed in the Avadi resolution, arose largely out of the pressures for social and economic reconstruction exerted by the Socialists.[6] These are achievements which may be remembered long after the Party's shortcomings as a political organisation have been forgotten.

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6. See : (a) *A Programme for National Revival,* Bombay, 1950.
(b) *Thirteen Point Programme of the Hind Kisan Panchayat to End Poverty,* Bombay, 1950.

POSTSCRIPT

The aftermath of split found the fortunes of the P.S.P. at a very low ebb. Dr. Lohia was one of the pillars of the Party and for some years its chief ideologue. His defection delt a sever blow to the P. S. P. Many thought that the organised socialist movement had come to a sad finale and that the P.S.P. had a bleak future. Things, however, shaped differently for the party. A few months after the expulsion of Dr. Lohia from the party when the furore over the split began to subside an encouraging picture about the P.S.P. began to emerge. Although the split had serious repercussions on the Andhra, Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh units the bulk of the members remained loyal to the parent organisation. In terms of parliamentary strength the following figures give an indication of the effects of split on the P.S.P. :

Remained with P. S. P.	**Went over to Lohia's group**	
Members of state Assemblies	155	36
Members of Legislative Councils	15	2
Members of Lok Sabha	20	4
Members of Rajya Sabha	6	Nil

The above figures also give a rough picture of the consequences of Lohia's defection in organisational terms. But the prestige of the Party did suffer considerably due to the split. The P.S.P.'s claim of providing an alternative to the ruling Congress lost some of its charm. Since then it has been the main concern of leadership to restore the party to its former place of pride as the main opposition to Congress.

In 1956 the Party received further shock in the death of Acharya Narendra Deva. Reference has already been made as to how

the Praja Socialists had come to rely on the mature leadership and guidance of the late Acharya in the hour of their greatest organisational crisis. Thus the holding of the Second General Election in the country could not have come at a more inopportune moment as far as the P.S.P. was concerned. It was required to enter into an electoral battle 'in the largest democracy of the World' badly bruised and handicapped. During the first general election in 1951-53 the Socialist Party, though unsuccessful, had made a bid at capturing governmental power at the Centre as well as in a number of States. But in 1957 the P.S.P. leaders had no such illusions. Their primary concern, now, was to project the Party as the main alternative to the ruling Congress. In this objective,as will be seen, the P.S.P. had a measure of success.

The election manifesto of the P.S.P. was a smaller document compared to 'We Build For Socialism', the election platform of the Socialist Party issued in 1951. The main aim no doubt was to reiterate the belief of the party in the old platform. But the election strategy of the party under went a radical change. The most significant departure was the policy towards the Communist party. During the first general election even a talk of an alliance with the Communists was something of an anathema to the Socialists. The linguistic problem in Bombay and the anti-congress feelings inWest Bengal were the two compelling considerations which required the P.S.P. leadership to think anew about its policy relating to electoral alliances, especially in view of the suggestion given by Jayaprakash Narayan to the opposition parties to put up a united front during the elections. At the Bangalore session of the P.S.P. the issue of electoral alliance had been responsible for a lot of heart searching within the Party. Those who were against such an alliance with other parties invoked the Gaya Thesis in their favour which had explicitly forbidden any alliance with Congress, the Communal organisations

or the Communists. But the majority of the delegates approved the resolution sponsored by the National Executive favouring such alliances. The stand was no doubt opportunistic and was definitely in contradiction with the spirit and tenets of the democratic socialist movement in the country. The resolution suffered from a lack of vision about the future of the movement which the party seeks to represent. It may, however, be conceded that an organisation crippled by internal split and in the exit of most of its top leaders had perhaps very little of other alternatives.

This policy also paid some dividents. The P.S.P. emerged after the election as an electoral force to be reckoned with.[1] Its members were able to form the main opposition groups in the Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Mysore and Uttar Pradesh legislatures. In the Bombay Legislative assembly the P.S.P.was the largest unit in the Samyukta Maharashtra Samiti, the principal opposition group. The return of P.S.P. members in such numbers contained an element of surprise for both its supporters and adversaries. The electoral success of the Party may be attributed to the desire of the Indian people to have a democratic and socialist alternative to the ruling party. A large section of intelligentsia remained sympathetic to the Party. The success of the socialist students and sympathisers in the College and University Unions was also a pointer in the same direction. Also, compliments must be paid to the rank and file workers of the Party. In the lack of top leaders and the vaccum so created, the voice of the ordinary members began to assume importance and the

1. Members elected to State Assemblies 200
„ „ „ Lok Sabha 19
Total votes polled by P. S. P. candidates 94,80,451

responsibility thus thrust upon them was discharged with a vigour and vitality which was really amazing. In this connection the part played by Ganga Sharan Singh, the quiet and unassuming Chairman of the Party, also deserves to be mentioned.

But on the debit side it must be admitted that on the issue of State Reorganisation the spirit of parochialism that emerged in the country had its effects upon the P.S.P. as well. This was reflected in the tussle between the National Executive and the Maharashtra wing of the party during and after the Second General Election with regard to the formation of a separate state for the Marathi speaking people. The relations of the National Executive with the Party members from West Bengal have also not been always smooth. This tendency may result in the loss of an all-India character of the Party. In the absence of an all-India outlook the P.S.P. can hardly hope to flourish as the vanguard of the democratic socialist movement in the country.

Struggles and Agitations

During the period under review the P.S.P. spearheaded some important agitations in a number of states over cultural and economic issues. Its Maharashtra unit, as already pointed out, was the chief architect of the Samyukta Maharashtra Samiti which demands bifurcation of the bilingual Bombay State into unilingual Maharashtra and Gujrat. The Gujrat unit of the party was one of the main constituents of the Maha Gujrat Movement. The food agitation in U.P. in 1958 was led by the P.S.P. in which about 4,000 of its members and sympathisers courted voluntary imprisonment. The agitation was launched with a view to end the scarcity of food in the State. Another important issue on which P.S.P. took lead was to organise people against the policy of drift and indecision of the Central Government with regard to

the problem of the Portugese enclaves in India. Since the achievement of national independence the Indian public opinion has been exercised on the continuation of imperialist rule over some small pockets in the country. The Socialists after 1947 were the first to raise issue of liberation of the foreign possessions on Indian soil and focus the attention of both the Government and the people of India on this issue. Failure on the part of the Government to solve the problem led many to think in terms of direct action. As a result in 1955 a large number of unarmed volunteers tried to march into the territories held by the Portugese. The Portugese authorities, however, were not willing to tolerate the presence of a large number of persons inside the territory who were determined to over throw its regime. They took action to prevent the entrance of the volunteers in which many were killed and wounded and large numbers were imprisoned. The P.S.P. took a leading part in the movement and some notably, N. G. Goray, Ishwar Lal Desai, along with a large band of workers courted arrest and imprisonment at the hands of the Portugese authorities.

Efforts Towards Socialist Unity.

As stated earlier the Socialists since the inception of the Congress Socialist Party have endeavoured for 'unity' among the left wing elements and parties. Before the World War Second an attempt at uniting the left wing forces meant bringing together of various splinter groups who called themselves Marxists. Since August 1942 Movement and the policies of the Communist Party towards it, the expression assumed a new meaning. The Communists were excluded from all plans of 'unity' among the left wing forces envisaged by the Socialists. Since the split in the P.S.P. in 1955 'unity' of the Socialist forces has been given a further new cannotation. It means, to-day, 'unity' between the

P.S.P. and the groups led by Dr. Lohia and P.V. G. Raju only.[2] In 1957 Jayaprakash Narayan made an abortive effort to bring about such a unision but failed. Partly, the failure was due to a lack of vision of a section of P.S.P. leadership and the intrangience and egotism of Dr. Lohia. Jayaprakash Narayan also cannot be absolved of all responsibilities in this matter. There was a feeling among a number of socialists as well as a few others not belonging to any other party who thought that J. P. should have been more persistent in his efforts and that he should not have abandoned his attempt abruptly. However, the longing for unity among the ranks of these organisations is a reality and gives hope for future.

Conclusion.

It would be erroneous to jump at any conclusion about the prospect of the democratic socialist movement in the country from this brief review of the activities of the P.S.P. We have tried to point out certain encouraging sings which are emerging in the organisation. However, it could be said with some justification that in spite of many trials and tribulations of the past few years the record of the P.S.P. is not too bad. The party may prove equal to its historic task of establishing a democratic socialist order in the country provided it is willing to act with vigilance and vigour.

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2. P. V. G. Raju is the leader of the Socialist Unity Forum. This group originally, a part of the Socialist Party of Dr. Lohia has seceded from it on the decision of forming a United Socialist Party in the country.

APPENDIX I

Programme

[Adopted at Bombay, Oct. 21-22, 1934]

OBJECTIVE :

1. Transfer of all power to the producing masses.
2. Development of the economic life of the country to be planned and controlled by the State.
3. Socialisation of key and principal industries (e. g. steel, cotton, jute, railways, shipping, plantations, mines) Banks, Insurance and Public Utilities with a view to the progressive socialisation of all the instruments of production, distribution and exchange.
4. State monopoly of foreign trade.
5. Organisation of co-operatives for production, distribution and credit in the unsocialised sector of economic life.
6. Elimination of princes and landlords and all classes of exploiters without compensation.
7. Redistribution of land to peasants.
8. Encouragement and promotion of co-operative and collective farming by the State.
9. Liquidation of debts owing by peasants.
10. Recognition of the right to work or maintenance by the State.
11. "To everyone according to his needs and from everyone according to his capacity" to be the basis ultimately of distribution and production of economic goods.
12. Adult franchise on a functional basis.
13. No support to, or discrimination between, religions by the State and no recognition of any distinction based on caste or community
14. No discrimination between the sexes by the State.
15. Repudiation of the so called Public Debt of India.

PLAN FOR ACTION :

1. Work within the Indian N. Congress with a view to develop it into a real anti-imperialist organisation.

2. Organisation of peasant and labour unions, and entry into such unions where they exist, for the purpose of participating into the day-to-day struggle of peasants and workers and intensifying the class struggle of masses and of creating a powerful mass movement for the achievement of Independence and Socialism.
3. Organisation of, and participation in, youth leagues, women's organisations, volunteer organisations, etc., etc., for the purpose of getting their support to the programme of the Party.
4. Active opposition to all imperialist wars and the utilisation of such and other crises for the intensification of national struggle.
5. Refusal to enter at any stage into negotiations on the constitutional issue with the British Government.
6. Convening after the capture of power of a Constituent Assembly elected by local committees of deputies of workers, peasants and other exploited classes for the purpose of formulating a constitution of the Indian State.

IMMEDIATE DEMANDS :

POLITICAL :

1. Freedom of speech and of the Press.
2. Freedom of association and combination.
3. Repeal of all anti-national and anti-labour laws.
4. Reinstatement of all peasants and tenants deprived of their lands owing to their participation in the movement for National Independence.
5. Release of all political prisoners detained without trial and withdrawal of all cases of externment, internment or restraint on political grounds.
6. Free and compulsory primary education and the liquidation of adult illiteracy.
7. Drastic reduction by at least 50% of the military expenditure of the Government of India.
8. Regulation and control of religious endowments.

ECONOMIC :

9. Municipalisation of public utilities.
10. Control of usury, direct or indirect.

11. Liquidation of debts owed by workers and peasants.
12. A steeply graduated tax on all incomes, including from agriculture, above a fixed income.
13. Graduated death duties.

CONCERNING LABOUR :

14. Freedom of labour from serfdom and conditions bordering on serfdom.
15. The right to form Unions, to strike and to picket.
16. Compulsory recognition of Unions by employers.
17. A living wage, a 40 hour week and healthy quarters and conditions of work.
18. Insurance against unemployment, sickness, accident, old age, etc.
19. One months leave every year with full pay to all workers and two months leave with full pay to women workers during maternity.
20. Prohibition of employment of children of school age in factories, and of children under sixteen and women under-ground.
21. Equal wages for equal work.
22. Weekly payment of wages whenever demanded.

AGRARIAN :

23. Abolition of landlordism in Zamindari and Talukdari areas without compensation.
24. Encouragement of co-operative farming.
25. Liquidation of arrears of rent.
26. Complete exemption from rents and taxes of all peasants with uneconomic holdings.
27. Reduction of rent and land revenue by at least 50%.
28. Abolition and penalisation of all feudal and semi-feudal levies on the peasantry.
29. Penalisation of illegal exaction and forced labour.
30. Freedom from attachment in execution of rent or money decrees of homestead, agricultural resources, and that portion of a peasant's holding which is just sufficient to maintain an average peasant family.

APPENDIX II.

Membership

[Clause of the Indian National Congress according to the amended Constitution in 1948]

A. 4 'Any person of the age of 21 years and over who believes in A. I. (objective) shall, on making a written declaration to that effect on Form (A), be deemed to be a Primary Member of the Congress...

Qualified Membership

'He shall be a habitual wearer of certified Khadi...He does not observe or recognise utouchability. He must be a believer in inter-communal unity and have respect for the faiths of other people. He must also believe in equality of opportunity and status for all, irrespective of race, creed or sex.'

'Provided that he is not a member of any political party, communal or other, which has a separate membership, constitution and programme.'

Effective Membership

A person was required to undertake some constructive or national activity as laid down by the Congress, and to sign a declaration to that effect. The District Congress Committee was to recommend a Qualified Member for Effective Membership only when the name of the member concerned had already been on the list of Qualified Members for at least a year.

Qualifications for Voter and Candidate

Voter

AVII—A (a) 'Every Primary Member of the Congress shall be entitled to vote at the election of the primary panchayat of his constituency.'

(b) 'All members of the Panchayats and Effective Members shall be entitled to vote at the elections of delegates

and, subject to provisions made in this behalf by respective provincial Congress Committees, to all other Congress Committees subordinate to P. C. C's.'

B (a) 'A Qualified Member shall be eligible for election to a primary Congress panchayat.'

(b) 'An Effective Member shall be eligible for election to any Congress committee.

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